An End to Bitter Frosts

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/28864026.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Categories:	F/F, Gen, M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal Lecter Series - All Media Types, Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Abigail Hobbs/Marissa Schurr
Characters:	Bedelia Du Maurier, Franklyn Froideveaux, Anthony Dimmond, Dr. Frederick Chilton, Freddie Lounds, Mrs. Komeda (Hannibal), Winston (Hannibal)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Royalty, Alternate Universe - Regency, Regency, Inspired by Anastasia (1997 & Broadway), Hurt/Comfort, Injury, Emotional Hurt, Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con, Implied Sexual Content, Established Relationship, Developing Relationship, and there was only one bed, Complete
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-02-19 Completed: 2021-04-07 Words: 30,994 Chapters: 12/12

An End to Bitter Frosts

by frogo

Summary

Princess Avvigayil disappeared 15 years ago, on the raid and subsequent revolution of the Old Country ways and rulings. The kings are exiled to grieve in France, the laws re-written, and life has changed for all. Especially one young girl named Abigail, who has purposefully ignored and abandoned all her memories of her past to survive the grueling conditions of many an orphanage.

Now 19, Abigail has no recollection of her past before the streets and orphanages besides the faint curve of a bearded smile and the smell of roses. But only if she strains her mind hard enough. Which she never wants to.

OR; it's an Anastasia AU.

Notes

This is a completed work and will update every few days, twice a week minimum. As of yet, I have no set schedule for chapter updates, sorry :/

Hope you enjoy! ʕっ•ᴥ•ʔっ♡

See the end of the work for more notes

Prologue - When there were three

Chapter Notes

This work is set in a universe that I've been treating very delicately and fleshing out slowly because I don't want to contradict myself or mess it up. Yes, Hannibal and Will do have a backstory, and I originally was going to work on their past and how their relationship would've developed but got cold feet when I realized how vast it would be. I started this part of that series instead in the winter of 2020 for some easy, fluffy, feel-good vibes while the world was a little bit on fire.

Also, I will not be specifying which country Hannibal and Will were rulers in, though the rest of the journey generally follows the disney map/indiana jones montage established in the Anastasia movie. I am no historian and this particular era is very hard for me to get a concrete hold of, and I really don't wanna offend anyone with my fumblings. So, you might wanna suspend your disbelief if something stands out as historically inaccurate.

With all that out of the way, Hope you enjoy! ʕっ•ᴥ•ʔっ♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The anniversary ball in honor of the union between the Kings Graham-Lecter had been planned for months in advance. The entire castle had been a buzz of swarming energy the weeks leading up to the big event, and Will had trouble finding ways of entertaining little Abigail and keeping his sanity in check.

Often, they'd spend their days in the garden, avoiding bustling servants and searching guards. His little Abby adored the crowns and bracelets he could weave for her, and he would wear the lopsided crowns and pretty weeds she'd push into his hair with as much dignity as a King could muster. Most always they'd be found out for their laughter, as he could hardy keep himself from tickling and playing with her. He wanted to treasure these years, and no amount of glares from her royal tutors would chastise him. Especially on the days that Hannibal found them first, when they'd be in for hours of fun.

They both could never resist their daughter.

Though, Hannibal was better at weathering her demands than Will. When she'd torn her stockings and mucked her beautiful dresses through the garden dirt, Will was the first to promise nice trousers and shirts just like Papa and Daddy wore. Whilst Hannibal resisted for a time and insisted she learn to keep her wardrobe neat, for she was a princess. They both wore him down, and after a time he relented and conceded to trousers and shirts in confidence with Will as a birthday present for her. Will had managed to convince his husband

that it would be a greater challenge for her, and she would treat the clothes with more dignity if she actually liked them.

The nights leading up to the ball were as chaste and stressful as the first few nights after Abigail's birth, though not *nearly* as emotionally fulfilling. Will didn't have any spare time to run off into the gardens, and Abigail was spending more and more time in the company of her tutors and her au pair. His heart twinged in regret every time he thought of her, the time they spent as a family dwindled as the preparations and invites and actual Royal duties stole them away from each other. He wanted this all to be over and done with so that they could go back to the days where it was just him and Hannibal and Abigail smiling with her ripped stockings and muddy dresses.

Finally, on the eve of the ball, Will had had enough. He cancelled everything he could and anything that was underlined and stamped in red for Will's immediate attention he shoved onto the nearest council member, practically dragging Hannibal from his study so that they could all spend at least a few hours together as a family before they had to project and posture for guests. Abigail was absolutely ecstatic and could barely contain herself when she learned her fathers would spend the evening singing and playing with her. Which proved to be a difficult hurdle when they finally tried to wind her down for an early bedtime, as she sleepily demanded one more story, one more song, one more, one more.

Little Abigail passed out in Hannibal's arms as he held her through a small waltz that was more of him rocking and swaying her than any real steps or twirls. His baby girl and the love of his life were painted ethereal by the candlelight and the rays of moonbeams that slipped through the curtains. Will felt like his heart could burst with all of the warmth the scene brought.

Gently, slowly, they laid her down and tucked her in. They kissed her forehead and stroked her hair before blowing out all the candles. All, except for her carrousel comfort light that she couldn't sleep without, proclaiming the magical quality of it came from the fact that Daddy made it for her, and Daddy would keep her safe from the dark even when he wasn't there.

Standing in the doorway of her room, holding Hannibal and watching their daughter breathe deeply and peacefully, Will was positive he could never want for anything else.

They went back to work, this time in the royal library, with a sense of ease and tranquility. Their duties and tasks weren't anything to be agonized over, after spending the evening with Abigail it was all inconsequential. She meant more to them than any ball or status event ever could.

The next morning, however, Will and Hannibal were made quite aware of their daughter's opinion of what she was to wear.

Abigail hated her dress. She wouldn't let anyone touch her and cried and screamed for her Papa. Hannibal quickly responded to her summons and comforted her, losing any and all thoughts of admonishment when she stared up at him with watery eyes and sniffled. Will had also come as soon as he'd been informed, but judged the situation well under control when he was greeted by Hannibal speaking gentle French and easing the small girl back into her frock while wiping away her tears. She forgot all about the lace and the frills and the scratchy

stockings when her Papa sang to her so softly and praised her for her bravery in the face of such perilous evil.

Abigail was absolutely radiant at the ball. The perfect princess, and most all the guests said as much. She curtsied and giggled, thanking each of them and delighting foreign dignitaries by greeting them in their own language.

The party may have been about her fathers, but she was the star of the show.

That night was the last time Will danced with his little girl. She tugged at his sleeve as another waltz started up, and he laughed before swooping her into his arms while she shrieked with joy. The floor cleared for the King and his daughter, and the music subtly changed to a lighter, more playful tune. Though of course Abigail didn't notice, too caught up in the majesty of twirling in her Daddy's arms like a real princess.

Looking back, Will can't exactly pinpoint where the gunfire began and when he lost sight of Abigail, but the two happened near simultaneously.

One minute he was conversing lightly with other nobles, keeping Abigail in his peripheries and leaning into Hannibal's hand at the small of his back. And then in the next, windows shattered and the smell of smoke assaulted his senses. He impulsively squeezed his eyes shut and coughed, hard, for only a few moments, but when he opened them Abigail was gone.

So were many of the guests, scrambling away from the open floor and into the dining room to get to the doors. Frantically, he whipped his head around and nearly struck out against the hand that grabbed his shoulder, before he realized it was Hannibal. He looked to his sides and scanned his husband before raising his voice to shout over the noise when he saw that Abigail wasn't with him either.

Hannibal clapped a hand over his mouth and hurriedly led him over to the kitchen through the servants door. There he was greeted with the gut-wrenching image of Abigail cowering, utterly terrified, next to a serving girl. He collapsed by her in relief.

She rushed to him and attached herself to his neck, her panic rolling off of her in waves. He could tell she was still afraid even though her Daddy was here, and no matter how many times he swore he would protect her and that everything would be alright, she still trembled and shook against him.

He hadn't realized Hannibal knelt next to them until he joined their frantic grappling and enveloped them all in his arms. He felt hesitant, anxious almost. Will turned to him over Abigail's head, and he could see Hannibal calculating something in his eyes before he came to a conclusion. Hannibal gently eased Abigail's crushing grip from around him and Will, and cradled her face in his hands.

"Abigail. There is a small passageway through the kitchen that leads to the stables." He began.

"Hannibal-" Will didn't like where this was going and he tried to cut in, but Hannibal only continued.

“She knows,” he nodded to the small serving girl, “Where it is, and you’ll both go on a little adventure together.” Both girls nod, though Abigail did so with watery eyes and the other with a steely confirmation that seemed beyond her years and sat odd on her face.

“Papa, you’ll be there with me?” She asked, desperately.

“No my darling, I cannot go with you, as much as I want to.” His voice was sad, and Will could cry in frustration at all of this.

“What about Daddy? Can’t Daddy come?”

And though it hurt his heart, he knew what must be done if they were to survive this. “No baby, I can’t go either.”

“Why not?!” She was close to hysterics, and her screams and sobs would only alert those invading to her location.

He drew her back into his arms once more, and gentled her tumultuous emotions as best he could. Stroking her hair and rubbing her back, he switched to French to comfort her, as she had always favored and been best placated by it.

“Because, darling, we’re far too big. And besides, this would be your adventure. In any fairy tales, do Papa and Daddy go with the princess everywhere?”

She sniffled, and shook her head, “No.”

“We will meet you at the end of your adventure. We’ll be waiting with hugs and kisses and we’ll embarrass you so much in front of your new friends that you’ll wish you were still on your adventure and not with boring Papa and Daddy.”

He managed to pull a weak, watery giggle from her, and she clutched at him once, less panicked than before. He squeezed her back, before releasing her so that she could hug her Papa as well. Hannibal picked her up and grabbed the hand of the serving girl to lead them forward, before releasing them both at the entry of the passageway.

He was right, it was so small that Will doubted for a moment that even Abigail would pass through, until Hannibal pushed at the side and it swung slightly wider. He set Abigail down and kissed her forehead before murmuring something into her braids in a language Will didn’t recognize, and nodded to the serving girl once more. Will couldn’t help himself, and he stooped down to hug her one last time. It felt like a goodbye.

As he watched the two slip into the small opening and disappear into the cavernous darkness, he shoved down the urge to cry out to her, to drag her back and run out into the night with her and Hannibal and not worry about never seeing either of them again. He sucked in a breath, and turned to Hannibal. They had to leave here, and he didn’t know the castle as well as Hannibal did.

It was a good thing they had sent Abigail through a separate exit. As they ran through the castle halls and through secret tunnels, they were soon recognized and all firearms and

manpower were directed towards them. They were shot at in the castle and across the plains leading to the stables, and Will was glad that the distraction might aid Abigail in her escape.Even if it meant he or Hannibal would die for it.

Hours or minutes later, they finally reached the decrepit shack that served as storage for wagons and carriages and had an attached stable. Quickly, Hannibal crept over to two of the royal steeds, fast, built animals, and loosed them into the night. With the time bought by the distraction, they searched the shack for any sign of Abigail.

They spent longer than they should have, and Will felt his panic mounting. Wasn't she supposed to be here? Hannibal had explained in sparse detail the plan for their escape, but as the minutes elapsed Will felt himself losing faith that all three of them would make it out alive. Breathe coming in huffs closer and closer together, Will forced himself to imagine that they might still be in the passageway, or were already hidden in a wagon, or had escaped into the night instead of any other darker outcomes he knew were most likely.

These possibilities comforted him, and were why he allowed Hannibal to hoist him into the cargo bed of the unassuming delivery cart when the sounds of several military war horses drew near. Perhaps there were other variables Hannibal hadn't told him, maybe Abigail had escaped another way. Maybe the servant girl with her wise eyes had taken them down a different tunnel to make sure they escaped. Hannibal arranged them curled around each other in the smallest corner up by the perch, and pulled a scratchy wool blanket over them before reaching out and covering them with an abundance of hay. He slithered his arm back under the layers and around Will before going still as the grave to weather those chasing them.

Hours and hours later, after being beaten and prodded through the awful blanket and straw in an effort to unveil any hiding persons, the carriage jerked and the tell tale clinking of a horse being hitched to the front made Will catch his breath. The wagon pitched and rolled as it started up, and Hannibal and Will clutched at each other so that they may stay as still as possible.

They rode for a time, stopping every so often and being beaten at once more while soft conversation happened up front with the driver. Will felt his fear and anxiety mount with every rock and pebble they drove over, sure they would be discovered. His leg had started burning some time ago, and he found his senses were reacting to any and all agents, leaving him trembling and grasping almost blindly at Hannibal's chest.

Until, finally, they came to a full halt, and their coachmen left his seat. His boots crunched on the ground as he rounded the wagon and came closer and closer to where Hannibal and Will laid underneath all the hay and the damned blanket. The driver came to a stop right by them, and leaned forward. Will thought he could feel his breath through all the layers.

He rapped once, twice, and paused before repeating the same harsh pattern against the wood siding of the wagon. And finally, he spoke.

"My Kings? Are you there?"

Hannibal looked to Will for several moments, weighing his options, before he shoved Will down into the bed of the carriage further and rose up through the layers at the same time,

disguising their movements as one seamless action and protecting his husband from any tricks.

“Franklyn?”, His voice held no anger, nor betrayal. Only shock and slight wonder at the nervous, soft spoken stable man.

At the mention of the man, Will emerged as well, anxious to hear news of what happened, how they managed to leave through enemy lines, and anything about Abigail.

“It is you! Oh how wonderful it is to see you both, I had nearly feared I hitched the wrong wagon and-” He was flustered and rambling, and while Will was grateful to him for saving them, there was something more pressing at hand.

“What of Abigail?” It burst through his throat, his voice was scratchy from disuse and from working to swallow tears to stay stoic.

Franklyn’s face fell, and that was all Will needed to see to know that on that night, his angel had died. Nothing Franklyn could muster in explanation or roundabout condolences reached Will through the fog of grief that had descended upon him. He felt as though the earth had cracked open beneath his feet and he was being dragged to a slow, agonizing death.

Hannibal silenced Franklyn with clipped words that Will couldn’t bother to try and pay attention to, and he returns, chastised, with an *‘Of course my lord’,* to his perched box seat. Hannibal settled back against the ledge of the carriage, low and hunkered, still in hiding though they had long passed the borders of their country.

He pulled Will against his chest with a soft grip at the back of his neck after he had stared blankly into the middle distance for a few minutes too long. Will found his body stiffly arranging itself to lay against him without any thought on his own part. Hannibal’s hand brushed through the small hairs at the nape of his neck, while his other hand buried into Will’s suit jacket, heaving him closer into his abdomen.

And it was then, in the biting chill of the early morning air, that Will cried in quiet, huffing gasps. The only sign he was allowed that he wasn’t alone in his grief was the dampness of the cheek and neck his face pressed into, and the irregular breathing of the chest he laid upon.

Chapter End Notes

How was it? Lemme know!

This work was beta’d by two wonderful people, my close good friend Bismuth, and my other dear friend V. Neither of whom have seen Hannibal and were totally unafraid to point out any flaws or odd paradoxes in my writing, and ultimately helped in polishing this to a shine that I’m so proud of. From the bottom of my heart, Thank you so much.

Your kudos waltz the night away in an empty ballroom. Your comments frantically search for secret passageways and raid the wine cellar.

”But then, in spite of us, and without our permission, there comes at last an end to the bitter frosts. One morning the wind turns, and there is a thaw. And so I must still have hope.”
— Vincent van Gogh

Where has the little girl gone

Chapter Summary

> Enter, stage center, Abigail. And copious amounts of adrenaline, as well as mildly concerning imagery.

Chapter Notes

> Warning! There is an implication of rape of nameless orphan girls, and attempted assault of Abigail. If that's triggering for you, you can tap out at 'Abigail was familiar with him even then' and jump back in at 'She beat him with a stick so badly'.
>
> Stay safe, guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail is too familiar with the image of blood splattered on fresh snow.

She knows the consistency, the color, even how quickly it should spread by heart. She can revisit it like a fond memory.

The other girls at the orphanage aren't like her. Or, she isn't like them. At this point, the line between her and them has become blurred (she's been here so *long*), and she has to remind herself every night that she isn't, and won't, become them.

They don't understand her.

Sometimes Abigail doesn't know if she understands herself, either. Well, she knows herself, understands her personality and her thoughts. She just can't remember herself.

Remember who she was.

She tried when she was smaller, of course she did, but after one too many migraines and bittersweet half-glimpses of domesticity and happiness she stopped. It had hurt too much, the rose tinged frescos of smiling faces and warm hugs juxtaposed against dirty and harsh orphanages became a burden to relive. So she didn't revisit them. And soon they faded into darkness and the frescos cracked under their oil sheen, and Abigail tells herself she is completely fine, until she doesn't have to, until the memories no longer resurface.

All the other girls talk incessantly about who they were, about their parents and siblings and lives. They just *won't shut up* about it.

The first time she saw the splash of blood on fresh snow, she felt like she'd encountered an old friend. Abigail was seven, and she had hit another girl who kept claiming to be the last Kings' lost daughter.

She didn't know why she did it.

No, that's a lie. That's just what she told the nuns. She knew why she did it in the moment. But the memory of the *why* that caused her to act still eludes her. The fact still remains, the moment Abigail landed the first blow, she couldn't control herself. She hit her again and again and again until the nuns had to pull her away kicking and screaming.

Through her thrashing and the frantic grappling of the nuns, she caught a glimpse of the groundskeeper watching her. He stood out to her from the rest, because he was completely motionless. Like a hunter catching sight of likely prey.

That, and how he was trying to hide in the edges of the forest line.

Abigail was familiar with him even then. Rather, she was familiar with his reputation. The girls all knew about his *proclivities.* And just exactly why he watched the girls like a vulture. She, like many others, had woken up in the middle of the night to whimpers and grunts punctuated by the creaking of bed springs. The older girls all corralled the smaller ones into bed piles so he wouldn't risk trying anything with them, and carried the heavy weight of a disillusioned world on their shoulders.

But that didn't stop him from cornering them outside of the dorms.

The only time he tried it with Abigail was in the forest when she was alone searching for kindling wood. She was barely ten, and nerves already frayed.

She beat him with a stick so badly in a fit of panic and anger that the girls didn't see hide nor hair of him for months. In between blows, for a moment his blood looked black, like a monster's. It ran thicker through the snow, spread slower than others did.

Abigail had learned to defend herself in the time before the girls orphanage. She had to, when she had been shoved from one monastery or wayward house to the other, where boys pretended to be men and those that promised protection turned a blind eye to life's atrocities.

Abigail has been well acquainted with atrocities.

But the return of the groundskeeper was surely one of the worst that had happened in the history of the world. He had grown volatile, and the older girls began disappearing one after the other. The nuns were oblivious, assuming they'd ran off early in their anticipation. More and more, one after the other until he no longer staggered them as Abigail neared 19. She knows he will come for her the night before she's to leave.

She knows, because that was exactly how he took the others. They were always excited, bursting with energy and life at the prospect of leaving. Staying up late telling the other girls in hushed whispers their ideas and dreams for how to spend their new lives. They'd pass out, and sleep heavily like that of the dead. That was when he always took them.

So she leaves, one night exactly a week before her ninteenth birthday. Packs a bag, stuffs her hair into a boys cap she'd snagged from the marketplace, and makes her way out through the window with a bit of a swagger to imitate other boys who'd exited and entered the same way. Chest puffed, hands on hips, the air of victory and accomplishment about her in case she's spotted by any nuns or other girls.

But Abigail didn't anticipated that Groundskeeper Hobbs would be waiting in the tree line outside her window. For a moment she loses her breath, and stumbles a bit in her act. That caught his attention, and she freezes like a deer in a hunter's sights when the silver gleam of a knife reflects in the light of the full moon.

She wavers a moment too long, and he sees through her disguise. The moment she glimpses the beginnings of recognition in his eyes, she turns, drops her bag, and runs as fast as she could into the surrounding forest. Abigail doesn't wait to see the sheen of danger that would rouge his dilating pupils, and flees like the prey she feels herself to be in this moment. She is grateful for the pants she had stolen now, for she would have tripped and been lost with a skirt or frock after naught but four yards.

Abigail knows the forest. She knows how to run. Fast, at that. Yet still, she grows more and more disorientated with each minute that passes. Each second she has to fight to keep her fear from overtaking her, and to keep her wits about her. She doesn't dare look over her shoulder to see where he is, but tries to listen for crunching footsteps over the incessant pounding of her heart. Abigail curses the pleasant weather of spring now, his footsteps would've been easier to hear in the snow. She has to strain her ears to track his movements, making her focus fracture further.

The more she ran, the more Abigail can feel herself loose her sense of direction with each tree she weaves her way through and each wayward branch she ducks under. She's been running deeper into the forest than she had ever gone before.

By now, they had long passed the dirt road that leads to and from town, and past the rivers that demarcate the Old Country from the New Republic. Racing faster and faster through unfamiliar nature as her blood pounds louder and louder the closer she can hear him come. Despite her best efforts to duck and avoid foliage, her face is still scratched bloody, and she has to blink drops that gather on her lashes out of her eyes. Abigail loses precious seconds of awareness doing so, sending her heart rate higher and higher when her eyelids stick together. She hurriedly wipes at her face and speeds up when she can finally open them again.

She's been running for what feels like hours, her breath coming in loud pants, and exhaustion is slowly seeping through her. Abigail can't keep this up. But that means old Hobbs must be getting tired too.

Abigail needs to find somewhere to hide.

And as if summoned from her thoughts, the trees thin and she crashes through a hedge of bushes. Up ahead, a vast decrepit mansion that seems to emerge from the depths of the earth itself makes her pause for the sudden urge to weep with joy. Abigail wastes no time in vaulting the looming gates and prays that they'll delay her pursuer.

She bursts through heavy oak doors into the dark, heavy air of large spaces that haven't felt life in many years. Dust and cobwebs crowd every corner, and she rushes up the stairs to the richer rooms, where she's more likely to find extravagantly cluttered spaces and unsuspecting passageways.

After searching and discarding several rooms and encountering several locked doors, Abigail enters what seems to have been the master's bedroom. Closing the doors behind her, she considers the room, and comes to a decision when she hears the great oak doors out front open once more and stomping echo through the halls. Her breath catches, startled, and she has to consciously make an effort to steady it, lest she be discovered still gasping for air like a caught fish.

Crawling into the blessedly empty chest at the foot of the bed, Abigail reflects over the oddest sense of deja vu that almost overpowered her in the doorway, before discarding it with the loud clunk of the closing lid.

And there, she waits.

And she waits.

And waits.

He bangs on every door and searches every closet and behind anything obstructing his view of corners and cobwebs. The walls of the chest seem to close in on her and surround her like a coffin the closer she hears him come. Abigail deeply regrets her choice of hiding when he crashes through the master bedroom's doors. He's yelling for her now.

She can hear him barrel through the armoire, and tear the old velvet curtains from the rack. He even goes so far as to push the bed out of place. She feels it scrape against the back of the chest, and it rocks her like a casket being upended from the earth. He hits something, and Abigail hears him curse violently.

And then he *sits* on the chest. And he weeps.

Abigail stills, and her heart stops. It takes all her effort to keep herself from screaming and kicking the lid where he sits. How *dare* he. Cry at the unfairness of her escaping? Weep for her survival?

A deep, boiling rage settles in her belly, and she releases the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. It is then that she vows to strangle him when - if, Abigail, *if* - he opens the chest and discovers her hiding place. She will lunge at him and claw his face off or beat him to death and finish what she'd been unable to that night all those years ago.

She's in the middle of imagining the pained and betrayed look in his eyes during disembowelment, when the weight bending the lid of the chest suddenly disappears, and she can hear him sniffling and shuffling his way through the doors once more.

Abigail finds herself oddly disappointed that he hadn't found her, and once the adrenaline clears from her head she's quickly ashamed and confused. Affecting relief instead, she waits

and listens for his actions to echo through the halls and into the room where she hides.

Minutes turn into hours, and still she hears his footsteps echoing and the disgusting sounds of his wet sobs and morose, halfhearted search attempts. He pleads for her to show herself, begging to empty rooms and deaf ears. The walls of this grand palace may have had ears next to every door once, but not any more. Eventually, the heavy oak doors close behind him once more, and blessed silence echoes through the rich mansion once more.

Abigail waits, sure of a trick, tense and taught like a pulled bowstring.

And it's there, hours and hours later, that she finally falls asleep. Cradled in the cold entombment of the chest, stiffly awaiting death.

Chapter End Notes

How was it? Lemme know!

The song that you can all blame for causing me to write this. But seriously, listen to it (or don't, you really don't have to) because it's such a chilling version of the original from the 1997 movie.

Your comments beat the shit out of Garret Jacob Hobbs, your kudos split up to take bets and comfort a frazzled Abigail

She has left home

Chapter Summary

Abigail does not have a good night's rest and makes a new acquaintance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Abigail startles awake, she barely muffles a scream. Where is she? Why does her body ache so badly? Has she died? Is this her tomb?

She kicks and struggles in the panic of a sleep addled mind, and the shock of adrenaline it causes clears the fog that has settled around her thoughts. That, and with one particularly harsh kick aimed at the top of her prison, caused the lid of the chest to dislodge, and light floods her temporary self-imposed trap.

But so does dust.

Abigail's panicked huffing breath devolves into hacking coughs and some sneezes. Tumbling from the inside and onto the cold floor, she crawls away on her belly, suddenly needing to be anywhere else. In the far corner of the room, looking down deliberately to avoid confronting the destruction of the room, she begins the arduous process of rubbing warmth and blood into her chilled limbs. Dimly, in the back of her mind she realizes she either slept through the day and awoke in the afternoon of the next day, or it's still the day of her escape. She spends some time contemplating this instead of the odd mansion or Mr. Hobbs.

She's cringing through cramps and sleeping muscles when the now familiar slam of heavy oak doors assaults her. Freezing in place, Abigail feels an overwhelming sense of dread and nauseated fear scream through her veins and pull at her gut. So wrapped up in her racing thoughts and cloying terror, she doesn't realize for a few moments that it's not one, but two people who have entered her sanctum. And one of them must be a woman, if the high, fluttering voice echoing through the halls is real and not a figment of some twisted hallucination. She considers whether or not she is awake, and if this is truly some dark nightmare, but forgets the thought when a fresh cramp wracks her foot. Definitely not a dream then.

The other voice, however, is definitively male. Abigail can hear the low baritone and unconsciously hones in on the sound until she thinks she can feel the vibrations of his timbre through the pads of her toes and her fingertips. Something pinches in her gut. Something red and ugly that reared its head just last night.

As foolish determination and adrenaline floods through her once more, Abigail rises from her protective hunch in the shelter of the dark corner.

Stalking over to the door, she resolves to drag Mr. Hobbs' soul to his grave, and Abigail is more than willing to join him if she must, to rid the world of his waste of life. The hard wood creaks and groans under her sure foot falls, and the doors of the master bedroom screech at the hinges, announcing her presence to those down stairs and across expansive hallways.

Stomping across a silk rug, she kicks over upturned vases and decorative armor, that once accented the halls just the night before, but now lay clattered by her feet. Somehow, this is the final straw that ignites and fuels the hate fire that's been kindling in her very core long enough that she forgets its beginning, or even its existence.

Her feet pick up, and now she's running through the halls once more, despite how her legs scream in protest. But it doesn't matter to her, it barely registers in her mind, not in the tidal wake of the all consuming rage that clouds her mind and wills herself to move. Faster and faster she runs, determined to find Hobbs and turn herself into the predator, and him into prey.

She stumbled into corners at first, her legs still stiff and uncooperative, but eventually she finds her bearings and doesn't wobble like a newborn colt. Tapestries and paintings of serene scenes Abigail hadn't noticed the night before paint her peripheries in blues and swirls of color and paint, only aiding in her single minded focus and sharpening her sight onto the end of each corridor, where airy voices bounce off the walls.

As her mind singles its focus on those twin terrors, something sticks out to her. Something....not quite right.

Their voices were far too light. Too carefree. Almost joking in tone. This discordant thought pierces through her haze, and Abigail stumbles slightly. Had Hobbs charmed a nun? He'd struck her as too oily and twitchy to ever appeal in any way, disgusting actions notwithstanding, but many of the nuns were either literally half blind or blinded by lust half the time whenever a man existed near enough to them.

Thoughts racing, and legs pumping even faster, Abigail's actions bring her to the end she'd first thought she'd desired, but now she was unsure. She bursts through the final hallway into the main corridor where the owners of both voices now stop in their own mid-run and stare at her in shock. She'd almost collided with a woman head on, and over her shoulder Abigail sees the man she'd heard.

It's not Hobbs.

Like the slam of a book or the crack of a bone, Abigail is stunned into shocked silence. She doesn't move nor muster the energy needed for any other thought for several moments. It plays like a loop in her head, the pounding of her feet and the faces that greet her around the corner. Over and over and over.

She's pulled from her repeating hallucination when the woman who stands across from her turns over her shoulder to address her companion.

"I told you, Frederick, this place is haunted." No, she's not a woman, she's a girl. She looks to be about the same age as Abigail even, and when Abigail's eyes rest on her face finally, she

registers a peculiar beauty about her, letting it wash over her, before internalizing the thought and letting it rest at the back of her mind.

Flushing lightly from her run, Abigail suddenly has to resist the urge to comb her tangled hair through her fingers or adjust her wrinkled and stained clothes. Or even just to wipe the dried blood and tear tracks from her face.

“What do you- Oh, *Oh!* I don’t know, the resemblance is striking, but she doesn’t really strike me as a feasible option.”

With each word that not-Hobbs says, Abigail grows more and more confused.

“Really? I think if we just get rid of the serial killer accessories and get that red satin dress I showed you the other day-“

“Oh come on, that thing was not part of the plan, and besides, the resemblance is so faint I can’t even-“ They’re talking over each other, and Abigail is left floundering in the wake of their conversation.

“Are you blind? Just look at her *bone structure!* She’s the one, I’m telling you, if she’s not an actual ghost.” The girl laughs.

She turns to Abigail once she calms herself, and finally addresses her for the first time.

“You aren’t the ghost of Avvigayil are you? Because that would be *so cool,* but very unhelpful.”

“A-avvegal? I don’t-“ She stutters out, her voice scratchy and hoarse.

“Avvigayil,” Not-Hobbs (was his name something like Frank?) supplies.

“No, no I-, my name is Abigail.” She manages to push the introduction through her throat and past her tongue, disarmed and struggling to follow the conversation playing out before her.

“Huh, real close.” She turns over her shoulder again to Not-Hobbs (Frankie? Ferris?), ”Should we ask?”

“Do you think she’s the best candidate?”

“I think she’s the only serious candidate we’ve considered.”

“Marrissa-“

Marissa. Her name was *Marissa.* They must have made some decision because the pair had suddenly turned to her once more, with expectant looks on their faces. It strikes her how different they are in appearance. At first she’d thought them to be father and daughter because of their similar complexion and hair color, but Marissa’s eyes are more green than Not-Hobbs’s watered brown.

And Marissa was staring at her. Did she make some sound? Was her face still bleeding?

“That is my name, sweet cheeks, don’t wear it out.” *Oh, my, god.* Abigail must’ve lost all her sense the night before. Did she just repeat her name *back to her face* after she was introduced to her? What was wrong with her?

“I-I, uhm, no sorry, uh. Sorry. I...” Abigail thinks it’s be best if she just shut up and left, she’d stayed here for far too long and just the acrid smell was going to give her hives. She really didn’t think she wanted to get herself involved in whatever they were talking about, if they wandered through a decrepit mansion searching for candidates.

“Rough night?” Marissa offers.

Abigail is silent for a moment, contemplating whether or not she should interact and risk the small vulnerability it would be to share arid small talk with the peculiar girl.

Marissa carries herself much the same as Abigail does, like the world rests on her shoulders and her back is twisted. But her eyes sparkle with a calculating glint, like she too knows the sheen of blood and wouldn’t hesitate to pounce when threatened. On second thought, Marissa looks and acts like a street cat. Abigail finds she is willing to test her resolve, and bites out a mystical retort to poke the fleshy bits of personality Marissa obviously projected for any falsities.

“‘Rough’ doesn’t even begin to cover it.” Abigail sighs, heavily, injecting a long suffering tonality in her words.

Marissa laughs at that. *Abigail,*who has never made anyone so delighted by her words as to giggle, had made her laugh, and she’s struck with how strong of an urge she has to do it again. No falsities to see, as of yet. Abigail doesn’t know if that’s a good or bad sign.

“I can believe that, I mean, whatever happened to you to have you covered in blood and running through an Old Country palace must’ve been more than rough.” They share a small laugh that’s more of a polite huff on Abigail's part. She thinks she might’ve forgotten how to, the sound coming out shaky and discordant.

Silence settles over them, leaving Marissa and Abigail to stare quietly at each other. Marissa looks like she’s peeling back each layer of her skin to get a peek at the what and why that drove her here. Abigail thinks she wouldn’t mind being flayed.

Not-Hobbs coughs, breaking their examination of each other, and finally asks the question that draws Abigail into the heart of the matter, and into the thick of their plot.

“Have you heard of the reward for the discovery of Avvigayil Graham Lecter?”

“You mean, the lost Graham Lecter princess?” Dumbfounded, the topic change seems to come out of nowhere to Abigail.

“Yes, Avvigayil. The reward that’s been placed for her return or...discovery.” Marissa chimes in.

“Yeah...It’s existed since her disappearance during the raid on the Old Country’s royal palace, right?” Abigail isn’t sure what this has to do with her, besides her apparent resemblance....Oh.

The dawning realization must show on her face, and Not-Hobbs nods while Marissa opens her mouth to explain before Abigail cuts her off.

“And you want me to, what, pretend to be her? So you can collect the reward money?”

“We’ll all split it, of course, but that wouldn’t really be of consequence since the Graham-Lecters are already so affluent that if you can convince them and inherit their will you’ll be set for life.” Not-Hobbs explains.

“ *If,* she can convince them, Frederick.” (Ah, that was his name.) “There’s still a lot more to it than that.” Marissa chides him, and sends an apologetic glance Abigail's way, as if sorry to discount her apparent resemblance and unproved skill at deception.

Abigail weighs her options.

Wandering through the unfamiliar forest to be found and slaughtered like an exhausted lamb, or escape in a cart with two criminals. If it came down to a fight for her life, Abigail doesn’t doubt that she could take Frederick. Marissa seems more of a wild card, hunched like a panther, all sharp smiles and biting commentary.

Maybe her unpredictability would be an asset, maybe it would be her downfall. Abigail wasn’t particularly inclined to gambling, especially with her survival, but she considers herself a damn good judge of character. Marissa didn’t seem to be actively malicious or outright violent, her demeanor leaned more towards a general trickster type. Abigail knew tricksters, she could work with a trickster.

And besides, Abigail thinks she’d like to take the challenge. It’s hardly the worst thing to have happened to her in the past few days. Even if it doesn’t work out in the end, she’ll be far away and out in the world with enough assets to carve out a life.

And that’s why she speaks up, infusing as much gusto as she can into her voice. “No, I can do it.”

Marissa startles at her response, and looks slightly shocked at the confidence that Abigail injects into such a quick acceptance to an, at best, sketchy offer. She gives Abigail a suspicious glance, trying to seek out her intentions.

“Oh? Can you now?” Marissa responds, after finding something apparently amusing in her posture, with a bit of a smile on her voice.

“Yes, I can.”

“And just what skills do you possess to be so sure that you’ll convince them?” Marissa teases.

“Well, for one, I already have a similar name.” Marissa snorts and shakes her head at the mediocre answer.

“And-, and, I’ve always had extremely good table manners,” Abigail offers. Marissa dismisses this as well.

“I’ve moved from place to place, so it’d be hard to track any of my past.” This seems to perk Marissa’s interest, and Abigail finds herself bolstered.

“And it would be easy for me to stick with a cover story, because I don’t really remember my childhood, so they couldn’t catch me in a lie.” Ouch, a tad bit too much to share, and Abigail can see the pity it sparks in Frederick's eyes. She hates it.

But when Abigail looks to Marissa, she’s only nodding and smiling. Not pitying, only appraising.

“Well, I don’t think I stand corrected.” Abigail tires to interrupt with an objection but Marissa barrels on and raises her voice to talk over her; “ *Because* I already said you were the perfect candidate.” Abigail’s frown melts away at that, and she flushes with embarrassment.

“Well, I guess that’s that.” Frederick comments, trying to diffusing the tension.

“So...? Do I have the job?” Abigail can’t help the slightly emotionless tone in her voice, slightly nervous, she reverts to hiding any and all emotions or weakness.

Marissa laughs, and shakes her head once before looking up through her lashes, then turning her head again to look directly at Abigail.

“You got the job, Teacup.”

Chapter End Notes

Phew, that was a doozy!

Also, the actress who plays Marissa is actually gorgeous, why don’t we talk about that smh

Super special thanks to V and Bismuth once more for beta-ing this, y’all I can’t say enough about how amazing they are :)

Why has she left home?

Chapter Summary

Some road shenanigans, filler, and Abigail learns about food....and more food

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once Abigail got the job, things moved quickly from there.

Marissa and Frederick collected their things from the Old Country mansion, and led Abigail round the back and down a dusty dirt road to a ramshackle stable where she made the acquaintance of two charming horses. They were sturdy, stubby creatures and hardly reacted when they were shown bridles and harnesses for the wagon. Born and bred for work, they were a common man's horses, and strangely fit in with the old mystical atmosphere.

Abigail wished she had a treat or two for them, but settled for gently petting their shaggy manes and muzzles. They'd seemed satisfied enough, and huffed gently at her in thanks when she gravitated away from them back to Marissa.

Marissa smiled warmly at seeing Abigail's affection for the horses, and offered a hand up into the back of the wagon. She declines the help, and tolerates the bruises on her legs from struggling up with dignity.

"So, where are we going?" Abigail asks, after they'd settled in for the ride, and Frederick had urged the horses to a light trot.

Marissa waits a moment to respond, watching the looming specter that is the decrepit mansion, disappear into trees with some reminiscent emotion that makes Abigail regret asking and interrupting this moment.

Thankfully, the moment passes, and Marissa turns away from the back of the wagon to face Abigail.

"France."

"France?"

Frederick turns just his head slightly so his voice can be heard, but keeps his eyes on the twisting, rocky road. "Because that's where the Graham-Lecter Lords have taken sanctuary since exile."

"Oh. Well, I suppose it's a good thing I know French then." Abigail reasons.

“You know French?” Marissa asks, surprising Abigail.

“Yes, I’ve known it all my life.” She responds in kind (and in proof).

“Maybe you’re from France?” Marissa jabs lightly, making Abigail scoff slightly in return.

“Well, I won’t know until we’ve made it there, that’s for sure.”

“I guess we won’t.”

“Hey, English please? I’d like to know if I’m going to be betrayed before hand.” Frederick pipes up from the coach seat, causing Abigail and Marissa to break into something akin to laughter. Abigail doesn’t like her laugh, it sounds too rough and croaky from disuse, but she’s been using it much more in this one day than she has in years. She supposes she’ll either have to get used to it or go deaf.

They finally settle moments later, after complaints from Frederick at not being taken seriously and how ‘worried’ they’re making him. They share a collaborative mischievous look for a moment, before Marissa apologizes with the utmost fake sincerity.

Then, after Frederick haughtily accepts her apology with an upturned nose, she turns to Abigail and asks in perfect German what her favorite dessert is.

Frederick squawks, thrusting Abigail into a husky giggle, the thing shocked out of her and her eyes widen at how natural it came. She’s never laughed this much in her life, and for a moment she forgets the dim and dismal air of her past. Lost in the joy of the moment, and just how Marissa’s grassy-green eyes sparkle in devilish happiness.

She manages to answer in half-broken German, and Marissa teases her for her accent and lack of grammar.

“Abigail! I could hardly understand you! I’m not even sure that was German!” Marissa starts, scandalized, hand splayed wide and protective on her chest.

“Oh, come on Marissa, it’s not that-”

“Bad? Abigail, your accent is abysmal! My ears, they’re bleeding, my German ancestors are rolling in their graves!” Marissa almost cracks, lips twitching and a gasp of a half aborted laugh makes its way through her scolding.

“No, no, we must fix this, now! You’re to speak in only German from now on-” Frederick protests louder than Abigail at hearing this, “And! And, I’m docking your pay for each word you mispronounce.” Marissa announces, putting on a faux German accent that makes Abigail struggle to contain herself.

“That’s not fair!” Abigail protests.

Marissa hums, for a moment, scratching her chin in a mimicry of serious consideration. “You’re right; you’re so bad, by the time we reach our first stop you’d be all out of the money you haven’t even made yet.”

Abigail is lost in the humor and insult she feels at the comment, and can't seem to decide whether or not to try her laugh again or raise her voice in outrage, and makes an attempt at assembling herself into composing a retort. Ultimately, she fails when Marissa launches into a long lecture about German prepositions, and how exactly she's disappointed in Abigail's apparent sacrilege.

Abigail misses most of it, distracted by her own laughter, and then by the lines around Marissa's mouth that crease when she would try to wrestle down a grin. She regrets not paying attention, however, when Marissa gives her a brutal quiz over what she'd just lectured her over. Abigail was left speechless and floundering for answers, only to finally give up halfway through to answer with hesitant jokes and plays on foreign words or phrases, when she grows in confidence (and when she gets Marissa to break her stoic facade a few times).

She dedicated herself to making the lines around Marissa's mouth furrow as deeply as possible, and trying to elicit a laugh that would be quickly disguised as a cough. Each time, the sound would send a zing of pleasure down Abigail's spine, and she can't think to stop herself, becoming intent on gorging herself in the peculiar rush that spread like cool liqueur through veins.

So they passed their time on the wagon, and soon enough Abigail's German improved monumentally. Though she was still struggling with her accent, and sometimes she'd slip into a French pronunciation and set off another half joking, half serious rant from Marissa. Play insulted and affronted, threatening all manner of repercussions to her pay, once even (through overwhelming laughter) to be thrown from the wagon for her disgraceful pronunciation and grammar of an incredibly easy sentence.

Abigail had never laughed so much or bonded so quickly with anyone before. She was alarmed at the fact that night, when they settled down to sleep around their camp's small fire, and she looked back on the events of the day. Mellow and regretful for setting up her bedroll as close as she did to Marissa, despite being warned of how much she moved in her sleep, Abigail lays in the borrowed bedroll and thinks.

Soon, Abigail's thoughts have devolved and she finds herself contemplating fleeing, out of fear for these new emotions and how fast they'd snuck up on her. She spent longer than she should have wrestling with herself and the logic of the situation, before promptly being torn from those thoughts by the Devil herself. Some odd sense had been knocked into her when Marissa, restless and yet completely at peace, turned around in her sleep to face Abigail, whipping her arm around in the same movement and conking her in the face.

Maybe Abigail was fundamentally different from the girls at the orphanage, and maybe that was okay. Because if she was different, that meant Marissa was different, and Marissa wasn't so bad. Criminal plot and horrible sleeping habits aside, she was the first person who had made Abigail feel like, maybe, just maybe, she wouldn't mind divulging her secrets to her. Revealing some part of herself to the thief. And maybe that wasn't wise of her, but Abigail had never been wise.

Abigail thought that Marissa wouldn't look too disgusted if she told her all about blood and snow and sticks. She fell asleep soon after, eyes fixed on the burning embers of the fire, to the sound of far away chuckles and what she thought was the sweet smell of roses.

Abigail woke to the smell of bacon, and the sound of clinking silverware. Stomach rumbling, she sleepily shifts and stretches, rubbing the gunk out of her eyes. After lying in the same place for a moment, letting her awareness creep back into her, and allowing the feeling of not enough rest settle into her bones, she sits up to be greeted by such an incongruous scene, that she briefly debated pinching herself.

Frederick and Marissa sat on mossy logs in frayed travelers' clothes, eating breakfast on a tree stump with royal silverware and delicate china plates. Abigail blinks again, and rubs her eyes in disbelief at the sight before her. When it didn't disappear, she finally pinches herself. Twice.

"What's going on?" Abigail's voice was rough with sleep, and Marissa startled at the sound before turning from her deep analysis of the table to smile mischievously at Abigail.

"Hey Teacup, you're finally up! Get over here." She waves her arm impatiently, summoning Abigail from the warmth of her bedroll and into the strange scene they'd painted. Frederick hastily shoves their own dirty plates aside and off of the trunk as she stands. Abigail approaches the makeshift table and extravagant setting with cautious confusion. They'd eaten quickly and without any utensils the night before, just bread and cheese and meat split evenly between the three of them, washing it all down with a skin of water they'd each taken a pull from after their meal.

This was entirely out of Abigail's comfort zone, always used to fighting for half-decent scraps. The only silverware she'd had experience with were wooden spoons on the occasion that soup made from mostly expired vegetables was being served at the orphanage. She can't recall a time in her life when she'd seen so many utensils of so many different sizes and shapes, nor anything like the thin plates decorated with such intricate designs.

Marissa takes a step away from the stump and gestures gracefully with a little bow to the seat she'd vacated, and pretends to pull out a chair for her. Slowly, cautiously, Abigail takes a seat on the knotted log and shuffles, mimicking pulling her chair forward while Marissa also pushes her imaginary seat. Sparing a small smile for the play act, Abigail buys herself some time before she has to look down at the god-awful mess of a place setting taking up more than half of the tree stump, that was most definitely looted from the Old Country palace.

Marissa waves once more to the set, and Frederick sits by her, staring expectantly. Abigail looks down, and her head hurts at the complexity of it. The patterned, swirling designs assault her already groggy eyes. At least there's food on the plate to distract from it; runny eggs and half cooked bacon. They look better than anything Abigail managed to scrounge for herself in all her years of wandering, and she reaches out for the fork closest to her that's still cold and slightly wet from being hastily washed. Abigail lets herself feel slightly impressed

at the apparent effort that's been put into the meal, and puzzled over why they went to all the trouble for her. When she picks up the fork, however, Marissa gently slaps at her hand.

"That's your salad fork, Abigail," she scolds. As if Abigail would've known that.

"What?"

"That's the fork you use for the salad course." Frederick chimes in, adding information in an attempt to help, but only further contributing to Abigail's mounting confusion.

"...What is a course?" Abigail questions after a few moments of contemplation.

Frederick chuckles, and Marissa joins in too, before shaking her shoulder and guffawing, *"'What's a course,'* good one, Abigail, but try again."

Abigail looks up, frustrated, and stares at Marissa until her bravado slowly melts away into frustrated amusement.

"You really don't know what a course is?"

Abigail shakes her head.

"Oh my god, this is gonna take longer than I'd hoped."

Painstakingly explaining the concept of several meals, and different types of food being served in one meal proved to shut down Abigail's mind for several moments, before she turned to Frederick, imploring for a confirmation of the abstract concept. When he'd confirmed it and offered the reasoning behind the extravagance of it all (that there was none), Abigail had finally grasped the definition of such an odd delicacy. After that, they only needed to name the different plates and cups and silverware, and Abigail was off to the races. She memorized them so quickly that both Marissa and Frederick were stunned at how easily she picked out which pieces went with which course when they quizzed her.

The whole ordeal lasted until noon, and Abigail sat back, pleasantly spent, with the spring sun high above and a light sheen of sweat covering her skin. Ready to rest for a bit, She closes her eyes and settles in comfortably to laze about a bit, she felt like she'd earned it. Suddenly, something bangs on the small makeshift table, and startles Abigail from her reverie.

Sitting up in surprise, she blinks her eyes several times to analyze just what had happened, and sees several thick tomes stacked haphazardly on the tree stump. Marissa looms over her, blocking out the sun and smiling the same sharp, mischievous smile for the second time that day. Abigail groans, she really wasn't looking forward to another lesson in royalty.

Marissa's grin grew teeth and plumped her cheeks as it stretched wider.

Chapter End Notes

The original end line was ‘Marissa’s grin grew teeth’ but that sounded a little malicious for the thing, when she only goes from a closed mouth smile to a teeth-y smile. So that’s why there’s that other half of the sentence, sorry if it threw you off lol.

Anyways, in case anybody’s interested here’s the basic plate setting I used as a rudimentary reference and mental image:

Your comments tease a flushed Raúl Esparza - I mean...Frederick..., Your kudos squeal at Abigail’s laugh.

Do her parents not grieve for her?

Chapter Summary

See updated character tags ;)

Will and Hannibal have entered the chat...lets see how they're doing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will doesn't join Hannibal for breakfast. Or lunch. During said meal, Hannibal taps his fork anxiously on the side of his untouched plate only once before giving up his appetite entirely and leaving for the study. Will may need space today, and he was more than willing to give him at least that. Though, that proved to be quite the task for Hannibal.

Reorganizing bookshelves, tending to the monetary affairs of their shared accounts, even art had betrayed Hannibal, as they can't seem to hold his focus for more than a few minutes. Hannibal finally sets out to seek for his elusive husband when Anthony asks if he'd like to take the afternoon tea in his study, or to be held until Mr. Graham could be found.

After dismissing him, Hannibal sits for a moment, silently ruminating over how to proceed. He could return to the arduous task of pretending to make progress in self imposed work, only to see Will later on in the evening, or, he could abandon all pretense and take flight to his beloveds' side. Finally, his decision made, Hannibal stands abruptly and leaves the room in a whirl of fabric, his action so sudden that the guards at the door have to scramble to follow.

He finds Will just minutes after looking in the first, and only, place he had to. It was one of those days.

Will was in the garden. With a wave of his hand, Hannibal dismisses the surrounding attendants and approaches the stone bench that Will regularly haunts. Old Winston greets him with a lazy wag of his tail and a lolling tongue. Will doesn't look up when his husband sits by him, nor does he react when Hannibal reaches for his hand to entangle their fingers.

Hannibal really should've thrown Freddie Lounds out by her appalling coattails the minute she managed to grease her way onto their property. But alas, the damage had already been done, and Will was once more rendered listless at the mention of their past life.

Hannibal flinches inwardly at the fresh memory of Lounds's screaming accusations and claims regarding their daughter's life and death. An unforgivable lapse in judgment, he must speak to Anthony further about tighter security measures. Nowadays, any mention of the past rendered Will mute and sent him far into the locked corridors of his mind. The servants,

guards, and relative staff knew not to speak of their masters' past. *Especially* not their daughter, underlined, bolded, and circled in the thorough documentation to be signed upon hiring, as even just her name could send Will far away into the confines of his own mind, from anywhere between mere minutes to several hours.

Some days were better than others. Though it seemed like the worse days came far too often, and rarely were Will's eyes clear and focused on his husband's.

Today, his love's eyes are glassy, focused somewhere between the hyacinth and rose bushes, the crystal blue of them shines with a more melancholy tint than usual. His unoccupied hand is resting idly on Winston's head, having long forgotten where he was, or to pet his companion. Will is still as devastatingly handsome as the day Hannibal had first laid his eyes on him. Even with old grief etched permanently into the lines of his face, he still managed to steal the breath from Hannibal's lungs.

Hannibal closes his eyes to breathe in the mingled scent of flowers and the ever familiar musk that was Will, before opening them and turning to his husband once more. From this angle he can only see the half side of his face, but it is enough.

With his eyes trained on Will's profile, he begins to speak. Meandering sentences, talking of trivial housekeep, treasured memories, even tidbits of gossip he'd pick up here and there about the how the chef finally left her wife, or which homes the maid found for the kittens her tomcat sired.

Some days, Will would come back to himself and turn to Hannibal to give him a soft smile and a 'hello', those are the days that Hannibal smiled freely and indulged in frivolities for the pleased, joyous look Wil gave him.

Today is not one of those days, and Hannibal knew it wouldn't be even before he sat down. Still, some small, foolishly hopeful, and humane part of his mind still bade him try, if only to offer Will a more vivid voice to carry with him in the passages of his memories.

Slowly, Hannibal passes the afternoon sitting by his absent lover. Eventually his voice grows tired, and it's long past time for Will to stretch and exercise his leg, if he's been sitting here all day. Which, knowing his Will, he has been. Hannibal sits in this moment for a few seconds longer, drinking in the ways the golden sun plays on his husband's features and how it halos his silver streaked hair that still brings their daughter to mind every time he glimpses it. Every time the days take this turn, Hannibal stops more often to savor the tranquil moments he can grasp with Will. He becomes... *melancholy* seems too trivial a word to ascribe to this feeling, but as of yet, it is the only one to come close enough.

Hannibal turns to Will and tells him they're going to get up now. He never knows if he's been heard, but he suspects not. Hannibal untangles his hand and reaches up to Will's curls to brush through them gently, and at the nape of his neck his hand makes its way down to the hollowed notch in Will's lower back. His other hand reaches to clasp Will's, and he pushes gently on both points to bid him stand with Hannibal. It's a slow process, made slower by Will's bad leg which locks after being immobile for too long. This is one of Hannibal's most hated tasks, but he won't allow anyone else to do it for him. Partly out of guilt at not seeing

and tending to Will's dislocation that night in the wagon, and partly out of fear that someone else might break his dear Will.

(He can still recall with perfect clarity the moment Will bit his knuckles under the blanket at a harsh crack from the flat of a sword meeting bone, and how he squeezed his eyes shut in pain every time they were prodded and beaten afterwards.)

Once they've both straightened out for the most part, Hannibal reaches down to extend his husband's knee where it still holds locked in the angle of sitting. When Hannibal gets his knee to crack and his foot to touch the ground, Will doubles over in pain to clutch at Hannibal's bent back. This, sadly, is what usually breaks Will from his rose-tinged wanderings. Hannibal rearranges them so that he can hold Will through the waves of pain and cramps that ripple through his leg.

His huffing gasps and pained grunts have become more familiar to Hannibal than he'd like. He's catalogued the different strains that Will can endure by measurement of how hard he clutches, or how loudly he cries in pain. He has memorized them, and whispers endearments and brushes featherlight kisses at the peaks and mellows to distract and comfort as best he can.

When, finally, the worst of it passes, and Will is no longer rendered speechless except for wordless expressions of agony, he grits out a thanks through his teeth and begs Hannibal to start walking. The standing is the worst of it, the sooner they can get him walking and his blood pumping the faster the cramps will fade. So, with a brisk but careful pace, Hannibal guides Will down the paved paths of their garden with gentle hands and soothing words. And eventually, his husband is back with him, and the cloud of pain that plagues his eyes too often has gradually dissipated.

They slow their pace, and Hannibal's hands no longer hold Will tightly to keep him balanced. Arm in arm, they stroll languidly through floral arches, past trees and beautifully kept flowers. Winston, who up until now had kept a close distance to watch over his masters, races up for playful antics that he's much to old to keep up, but that Will still indulges him in as best he can. Winston finds a stick and stands on his hind legs to offer it up to Will, so that he doesn't have to bend over to pick it up. Hannibal watches Will throw the stick over and over again, and the gentle smile he wears that grows infinitesimally with each return of the slobbery strip of wood.

Hannibal manages to steer them back through the garden's winding path to the house as the sun begins to set. Here, Winston bids farewell to his new plaything by giving it an honorable burial, to the requiem of Will's amused laughter. Winding an arm around his husband's waist, Hannibal looks on fondly while whispering a playful eulogy for the gallant twig, and leads Will inside after his chuckles die down.

This is where many things could go wrong. Will may recluse himself back in his mind, or grow volatile with the separation from his garden sanctum. Hannibal is not a particularly religious man, but he always finds himself catching his breath and sending a quiet prayer heavenwards each day they have to cross the entryway after a day spent in the garden.

As they walk inside, Will half-turns to him and presses his forehead to Hannibal's jaw in thanks. Hannibal's grip tightens around Will, and they share this quiet moment together, untroubled and unobstructed by the rest of the world rushing by them. And though they don't acknowledge it, they both know they wouldn't be in this moment if not for the horrible past they've endured. The trickle of sadness and grief that never truly dissipated, even after they'd found sanctuary in their quaint country house, seemed to seep the color out of their life. As regretful as Hannibal was to admit it, their lives had seemed to simultaneously lose and gain new meaning after everything had been taken from them, except each other. There was a time in their past, when they would be completely satisfied, if not exhilarated, at the very prospect of a quiet life away from any cities or prying eyes, with only the other for company.

But now, after receiving more than they could ever wish for, and having it all disappear in one night...it left scars. Physical and mental scars that would ache and throb for the rest of their lives. Hannibal is thankful, truly beyond words, to have Will, that he survived and can hold his husband each night and look at him every day, even if his gaze drifts and his body is broken. He wishes he could give everything back, to bring back those smiles that would brighten his whole face with a swirl of long, brown, braided hair and the laughter of a child.

However, the time when that wish was even remotely feasible had long past. Now, Hannibal must endure with sad smiles and the warm weight of his husband against him.

Will lifts a hand to cradle the other side of Hannibal's face that his head doesn't lean against, still frozen in the foyer for a moment. Silent specters of a lost life, haunting the living because they can't bear the fact that they themselves have long passed.

The intimate moment is broken when Anthony traipses down the stairs calling for the both of them and inquiring once more about the damned tea. Hannibal's grip tightens again, causing Will to smile at his husband's irritation. He relaxes his hands at the quiet huff Will releases, at least garnering some satisfaction when Anthony rounds the corner and stumbles upon them still entangled so closely. Seeing his face redden and how he wordlessly retreats slightly with mumbled apologies.

"It's alright, I think we'll skip tea for a light dinner." Will's voice is quiet, and slightly scratchy. Anthony manages not to balk at the response from the mostly mute lord of the house, and bows his head nervously, though their royal titles are utterly meaningless.

"Anthony, please have dinner taken to the study." Hannibal calls after him, not bothering to look at his retreating form. His eyes carefully scan Will's face, looking for minuscule tells to explain the shift in mood. He only sees tired lines in his face, and the same restrained smile pulling at slight wrinkles in his cheeks and eyes. The night had taken an unexpected, yet not unwanted turn.

His Will was here with him, and Hannibal couldn't ask for anything else.

They retreat to the study, taking their time on the steps, as they were a struggle for Will. By the time they've reached the corridor leading to the study, Will is relying more on Hannibal than his own legs to carry him to their destination. In a fit of whimsy, Hannibal reaches down and sweeps Will off his feet and he clamors to wrap his arms around Hannibal's neck. He is

rewarded with startled laughter and a smile pressed into his shoulder. He ignores the protests of his back and stiff joints when his husband is so visibly charmed.

The guards the stand perpetually stoic in front of the study and open the door for him, dutifully ignoring the actions of the odd lords. Hannibal gently lowers Will down onto the chaise lounge, and before he can start to move away, Will tugs him down by his lapels to join him.

“I was going to light the fire.” Hannibal offers in explanation.

“We can keep warm enough without it.” Will appeals quickly, and Hannibal shakes his head in retribution. Both of them would suffer in the cold, no matter how close they huddled. They were no longer whimsical youths who could afford not to care for the limits of mortal physicality, but aging men with sore backs and aching joints that would suffer in the damp, stuffy environment.

With a gentle kiss to his temple, Hannibal untangles himself from octopus limbs and makes his way over to the fireplace. When he returns to a slightly pouting Will, he wraps him up in his arms and kisses his cheeks in apology, before wiping the pout away with a tender kiss. They settle in, wrapped up in each other, for a quiet night.

They’re both half asleep by the time dinner arrives, and eat little of what's on the tray. Will had always been adverse to cooking that wasn’t his husband's, and Hannibal hadn’t cooked so often recently. But he always ate when he was with Hannibal, and that was good enough to get him to shove down a decent meal. Something tugs in his chest at Will’s actions, yet he still can’t seem to find a name for the emotion.

When Will pushes his plate away and reaches for whichever book they’re working through that sits on the table by the tray (a thick tome of French poems), Hannibal takes one final bite of his own meal and settles back against the arm of the lounge. Will shifts to lie on his chest, and keep his bad leg elevated so that it won’t stiffen too much. They recline together, a mess of aching bones and tired eyes, when Hannibal begins to read. He is aware of the affect his voice has on Will, how soothing his husband finds it. He is hardly surprised when Will’s breathing slows and evens out, and he’s drifting off before Hannibal has even finished a chapter.

He marks the page they’re on and closes the book, setting it aside when he’s sure Will is mostly asleep. Gently, he rouses enough to sit up so that Hannibal can quickly pick him up and carry him to their room. Will blinks sluggishly and moves like he’s underwater.

The hall is dark and cold, and Hannibal’s bones protest with the combination of strain and chill. It takes him longer than he’d like to admit to make it the few feet to their bedroom, and once he makes it through the doorway and has settled Will on the bed, he has to stop and catch his breath.

After ridding Will of his socks and shirt, he tucks him in and he readies himself to join his husband.

Once he’s completed his nightly routine, and slides under the covers, Will rolls over sleepily to carve himself a spot into Hannibal’s abdomen. Nuzzling and scratching, before giving up with what Hannibal can only approximate as a disappointed exhale. Still, he gladly opens his arms and lets himself be used as Will’s own heater and pillow.

Though he is not exactly content, a feeling he’d reached a great many years ago when a nurse had handed him a bundle of chubby limbs with a face gone red and puckered from screaming, he is satiated. He could, and will, last with just this. It is more than enough, more than he could hope to be granted. It's better to have one rather than neither.

Chapter End Notes

1. Yes, Freddie Lounds *absolutely* wears abysmal tuxedo-style suits with coattails, no I will not be taking criticism on this detail.

2. I am not a medical doctor (shocker, I know), I have no idea how leg or bone fractures/breakages/dislocation injuries work and mostly bs-d my way through Will’s leg injury. I can’t offer any further explanation on that front, apologies.

3. Winston is here! Best boi has also entered the chat :D

4. Hahaha wow them coping mechanisms r pretty debilitating aren’t they? Don’t worry, it’ll get worse :D

your comments are horrified at how Hannibal and Will cope separately, your kudos debate the mental and physical repercussions this may have on their relationship

What do You know of grief!

Chapter Summary

Oooh they're almost there folks! Things happen, feelings are felt ;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail lies in the back of the wagon, and sighs dejectedly. She has all sorts of knots and sores on her body from their never ending journey, and the mysticism of it all has long faded. Four weeks in and she was beginning to surrender to the monotony of clacking wooden wheels and all the names in her 'royal lineage'.

She turns herself over and lies on her back to watch the slowly passing clouds overhead. They all look the same, passing through so many countries. Though, in Poland she hadn't gotten that good of a chance to study them, as the torrential downpour drove them quick and shivering from the region. She'd like to consider herself an expert in such things, dedicated to examining mundanities of nature to the point of absurdity. It was the best way to pass time and keep her sanity. Well, maybe not, most people she'd encountered didn't stare into foliage and contrast the size and shade of their leaves.

Maybe that made her a little crazy.

She sighs again, but this time, on the intake, she abruptly sits up at the scent that greets her. Marissa gives her a smirk and nods her head to the road in front of them. Abigail scrambles up to the front of the wagon in excitement, and the sight that greets her may as well be pure euphoria.

The trees ahead are thinning like parting curtains to reveal long stretches of grey, rocky sand and tufts of grass. The road disappears down a steep decline, and there's a thin band of blue on the horizon.

The sea.

Frederick huffs a laugh at Abigail's wide, slack jawed awe. Marissa joins her side and bumps their shoulders to get her attention. Abigail is reluctant to tear her eyes away from her first glimpse of coastland, but after a few moments of drinking it all in, she manages to turn away for just a second.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Marissa whispers, gaze trained on Abigail's face, tracing her features before finally catching her eyes.

“Yes,” she says. Some part of Abigail flutters deep down so violently she feels like she may be sick over the side of the rickety wagon.

Marissa smiles, and turns to the view once more. Abigail does as well, and the craw of seagulls sounds absolutely divine to her ears after weeks of huffs and snorts from belligerent horses.

The fresh smell of salt and something inexplicably earthy that Abigail can’t place grows and grows until she can’t remember the staleness of empty spaces or woodsy forests. The magnetism of the coast draws her in, and Abigail can’t believe she lived her whole life without a glimpse of something so amazing.

As they descend the criss-crossing path that cut deep into a steep hill, Abigail gets to look more closely at the port town they approach with a bird's eye view. It’s bare bones and ram shackle at the ends and toward the remote stretches of beach, but the farther she looks in, the more paved streets and well built structures she sees. They all seem to be leaning into each other, painted in bright colors ranging from blindingly bright to cracked and wind-weathered. The port itself is a wild mess of people and energy, boats docking and leaving, even though it seems like there’s almost no empty spaces for arriving vessels. Smaller boats are crammed in so close that Abigail doesn’t understand how any of them would be able to embark.

“Is this really Germany?” Abigail utters, still reeling.

Frederick chuckles and responds without even turning around, “You wouldn’t have guessed it, would ya?”

Abigail shakes her head, that wasn’t her point, she thinks this might be some form of paradise. “Will we stay for a while?”

Marissa nods, “For as long as it takes to buy a ticket and get on the next ship to France. Maybe even update your wardrobe before, if we get the chance.”

Abigail manages a glum *‘okay’*, and focuses on committing everything she can see to memory. With the sheer number of ships coming and going, and the vastness of the town itself, she doesn’t doubt for a second they’ll be here for longer than a day or two.

She’s jolted from her thoughts when the wagon heaves and thumps against the rocky terrain with tremendous force. Abigail almost slides from the front over the side, when Marissa grabs her arm before she could pitch over the side. The rest of the descent is no better, and they’ve almost reached the bottom when they hear a sickening crack and the wagon pitches down at the back. Marissa and Abigail flail and manage to get a hold of one another before they both tumble out of the hold past the open back of the coach, onto the ground, with panicked yelps.

Frederick stops the horses and dismounts quickly to see what happened. Marissa and Abigail are a tangle of limbs and curses. Marissa is the first to heave herself up and away, and she turns to Abigail.

“Are you alright?” She asks.

Abigail only groans in response. Distantly, she hears Frederick curse and kick the undoubtedly broken wagon wheel.

She sighs. Definitely not paradise then.

Abigail manages to convince Marissa into a lodging room, and extracts a promise that they won't leave until she's slept in an actual bed. It wasn't too hard, she suspected Marissa was worried about her after she gave in with barely a fight.

Well, there was that, and the glances she'd been sending her way when she thought Abigail wasn't looking on the long walk into town. A balance between worried and anxious. Never mind that she'd fallen on top of Marissa, but Abigail didn't want to broach the topic to play debate.

(She was a little afraid of what else lurked behind Marissa's eyes when she thought Abigail wasn't looking, and that she might be faced to confront what's been building between them in their close quarters over the past few weeks.)

Abigail turns away from the grainy wood of the closed door. She has the room to herself for now. It's small, and there's two thin mattresses pushed against opposite walls. Which doesn't really do much to separate them, only leaves a rift about 3 feet wide between them and an awkward conversation to be had about who gets the only pillow thrown haphazardly on the linens.

There's a rickety desk and chair set to her right, and she has to step around it because of how close it is to the door. For all the room's faults and cheap nature, it is redeemed by the window. The glass is foggy, and when Abigail attempts to wipe it some with her sleeve it swings open with a shrill creak. Glad she is alone so no one sees her jump and clutch her heart like an old woman, Abigail lets herself feel foolish and sheds the embarrassment quickly before it lingers.

She pushes the other window pane out without scaring herself (*huzzah!) and leans out a little bit. Wind rolling in with the tide gently brushes her face, ruffling her hair, and with it came noise from the market below, wafting into the room. Delighted at the vast improvement, she decides to sit for a while and categorize the passers-by underneath her. It's amusing for longer than she'd expected, she originally planned to examine the modes and etiquette to the fish market, until she noticed that there were only children running the flower stall, and the butcher's husband was sneaking extra meat to someone that Abigail learned through observation to be a possible lover. Soon, Abigail had became wrapped up in the lives playing out before her, totally ambivalent to her presence.*

She ponders a bit if this is what the life of a god feels like, and what Marissa would say on the matter. Maybe something snarky, or something philosophical that would stun her into giggles. The matter is settled when the door swings open and Abigail almost falls of her perch from the windowsill. Marissa is a swirl of energy holding bags and bags of.....dresses?

"What...is all this?" Abigail asks when she manages to recover from her near fall.

"Clothes, fancy- well, elegant? I'm not sure what category they fit into but they're all generally very posh and-" Marissa is rambling and out of breath all at the same time.

The clothes are, upon further examination, horrendous. They're not even posh, they're just ugly drapings of fabric with odd bows and faux flowers stitched haphazardly in unappealing arrangements, with odd fish allusions. Nothing about them is fancy, Marissa just got fooled out of what appears to be a small fortune.

"These are disgusting."

"Come on, you don't have to like them. Think of it like an actor's costume." She tries for placating, and it sounds weak even to herself, judging by her wince. Abigail is having none of it.

"No, I mean, these aren't luxury outfits, they're cheap allusions of high fashion."

"Oh, like you know high fashion." Marissa scoffs, and for some reason Abigail's pride is hurt.

"Like someone in a backwoods fishing port town would know high fashion either." This stops Marissa for a moment, and Abigail is proud for scoring that one.

"Okay, you have a point, but what do you have against such extravagance to doubt it at all?" Marissa gestures at what Abigail guesses is supposed to be an evening gown with undue grandeur.

"Can you seriously look me in the eye, and tell me they aren't the worst looking clothes you've ever seen?"

Marissa gives it a good try, but her face crumples halfway through the proclamation.

She hums in consideration, "Alright, you may be right. That lady was pretty shady anyways, can't believe she almost got me to buy that brooch...guess I have to pawn these off and we can go tomorrow to get something tailored."

"It doesn't have to be fancy; if it fits well and looks tailored then it should tide us over until we can get an actual French style ensemble, right?" Abigail, now desperate to be rid of the appalling clothes, tries her best to work her newly discovered angle.

"Okay, you win this one, Teacup, I won't parade you around in these fine German trappings." Marissa says after clutching her chin and considering her words, a new habit Abigail discovered she had. She flushes furiously at the thought of being paraded around, what in the devil's name possessed her to say it like that!

“We’ll go early, when there aren’t too many people, and that’ll give us enough time to get a few outfits tailored and get on board the next boat to Paris.” Marissa murmurs mostly to herself, already forgetting Abigail while she packs the sins of humanity incarnate into their respective bags to dump onto another gullible soul.

When the door clicks shut after her, Abigail collapses with a relieved sigh onto the chair by the desk.

Chapter End Notes

No, I will not be providing reference photos for the cursed dresses, I don’t want to be held responsible for collateral damage thank you very much. Use your imagination, or just picture prom dresses from the 80s but with more fabric and weirder drape-patterns.

Your comments make a run for the ocean, your kudos have to restrain them in order to keep up with the story

Am I not here with you now?

Chapter Summary

Uh-oh...Marissa realizes something...and Abigail remains oblivious.

;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marissa has catalogued every aspect of Abigail's face by now. It started in the back of her mind and gradually moved forward until she found herself memorizing the exact shade of blush she could cause, with given any range of words strung together cleverly enough.

She feels like a real creep for it, especially now, in the dead of night when she can't sleep. Marissa is glad she gave the pillow to Abigail, because she looks like a picture of a princess in slumber in a fairytale book.

After a few guilt ridden strains of thought and a healthy indulgence of self-loathing, Marissa turns over and makes a diligent attempt at sleep. Sheep needed counting, and infinity quantified.

Only a few moments later she turns away from categorizing every knot in the wood planks to look at the *opposite* wall and compare her data, and decidedly *not* at Abigail who just happens to be in front of said wall, and any guilty glances Marissa might get are entirely coincidental and not her fault.

But now everything is too humid and the coarse blanket is suffocating her. She throws it off, and then wraps it around herself again soon after when the air of the room betrays her with its chill. Before throwing it off, and wrapping it around herself once more again and again and again. So the cycle continues until she finds an equilibrium with half her body covered and the other splayed wide.

Well, now that that's settled, she'll fall asleep any minute now.

Aaaany minute now...

Oh, damn it all.

Sighing loudly, before stopping herself when she hears Abigail shift and whimper across from her. The pitiful noise snaps her head to the side and she debates waking Abigail up to ask her what she was dreaming of. Her brow is wrinkled, and her fingers twitch where they rest at her sides.

She knows Abigail is not new to pain. She carries herself with the air of one just as ready to lash out and run as soon as she would offer tenuous bits of her personality. Marissa is very conscious of each sliver she is allowed, and is even more careful not to spook her, lest she lose the chance for any more information to hoard, like a dragon does precious jewels.

Marissa herself is familiar with pain. She and Abigail are similar in that they each don't have any ties to keep them in the New Republic, like many their age. Growing up in a near war zone, you lose much, and linger on even less. Though they tiptoe over the grounds of a fragile friendship, any inclination from the other would send them either scattering away or rushing to grasp each other in suffocating holds. Marissa isn't sure which she prefers, except that she'd like to delay the outcome for a little while to linger in the time she has with Abigail.

Marissa is content to watch over her, and scare away the monsters that lurk in the shadows of her dreams. She reaches over and hovers a twitching hand over her white knuckled grip on the sheets after a few minutes hesitation. She is decided when Abigail thrashes her head back and forth on the pillow, and her hand drops to hold the closed fist. Slowly, very, very slowly, her whimpers ease away, and her hands don't clutch and twitch. Her face stays frozen in place for a moment, and Marissa's hand gravitates upward to ease the furrow away with the careful tip of a finger.

It's agonizingly slow, and Marissa thinks if she had any control over her own hand she'd just speed this up and use it to slap herself. Abigail's face is enshrouded in shadow by the time her hand reaches it, and Marissa wants to pull it back just to see her features and not the hollow, odd creature the darkness creates.

Immediately upon contact, her face goes slack and her eyelids begin to move under shifting irises.

Marissa goes stock still, hand still obscuring most of her face, and waits to see if she's gone and ruined everything. Maybe she won't run away immediately, there may be a period of resentment and glaring, before Abigail will disappear into the night.

But nothing happens, her eyes don't pop open to burn holes through the gaps of Marissa's fingers. And after a few tense minutes Abigail sighs a little puff of air that hits the palm of her hand, serving to jerk awareness into the traitor of an appendage and she yanks her hand away like she's been burned.

Abruptly, she turns away from Abigail and back towards the safety of the odd patterns in the wood grain to contemplate the repercussions of having her whole arm sawed off. She'd deserve it, really, she reasons.

Her heart is still pounding, blood rushing through to her head and cheeks aglow, when she is finally (*finally*) lulled to sleep with the slowing staccato of Abigail's huffing breaths. Only after she's made a fool of herself, because her life is utter bullshit.

It’s a challenge to look Abigail in the eye the next morning, but she manages to conceal it with as much dignity as she can muster.

Abigail notices, of course she does, but graciously doesn’t comment. Something happened, Marissa knows she suspects, but she’s not sure what.

They make trivial small talk, less of an obligation and more an assurance that the other isn’t tired of them, and they still wander around the precipice of the same great new vastness that they can’t identify. Marissa knows they both need this reassurance in the sleepy disorientation of the morning, and they’re far past the point of alarm at their growing co-dependence. If the worse comes to worst, they can (and most likely have) lived without emoting for a while.

The sun has just risen fully when they set out onto the streets, and only a few stalls are open. Except for a few smaller food vendors that offer breads and pastries for the fishermen and those boarding early ships. They grab some croissants and Marissa trades Abigail hers when she wrinkles her nose in distaste at a poorly chosen flavor.

They idle for a bit, until Marissa finally retraces her steps to the tailors she’d scouted out the evening before. The shop isn’t open yet, hadn’t even been open yesterday, and they idle outside for a while after scanning the chalk drawn hours to confirm it would be open today. They sit on the curb like the delinquents they feel themselves to be when confronted with scathing looks from passers-by. Abigail shrivels under their gaze, and Marissa jabs her with the toe of her boot until Abigail turns her attention to the girl next to her.

“Don’t pay attention to them, Teacup.”

Abigail shakes her head quickly, putting her arms back behind her to lean on them. She tips her neck back and Marissa can see she’s closed her eyes. Marissa eyes the expanse of her neck, torn between appreciating the delicate arch of it, and the cloying worry that shrouds her at how vulnerable it seems.

This is how the tailor finds them, when she finally arrives. She’s slender and tall, appearing to be perfectly put together. With not even a hair out of place, her blond curls coiffed and combined with a tight blazer looks utterly impeccable. Marissa regrets sitting on the ground now, because of the opportunity it lends her to look down her nose further at them. She bristles at this lady’s haughtiness, and glares right back.

“I assume you’re here for my services.” She talks in meticulous increments. It’s as if each word isn’t exactly spat, but bitterly slips out like notes of a song that Marissa isn’t sure she particularly likes.

“We need a tailored dress. Maybe a few, if you can manage it by about 8 pm.” Marissa responds with badly hidden venom.

A sculpted eyebrow lifts in such a calculated motion that Marissa can’t decide whether to blush or lash out. She isn’t sure if she’s being appraised or insulted.

“I see. And you can pay?”

Can she pay. Of course she can pay.

“Yes.” Abigail answers for her when Marissa just stares the tailor down.

“Alright then. My name is Ms. DuMaurier, and which of you is looking to get kitted out this early in the morning?”

It’s absurdly boring to go to a fitting. Ms. DuMaurier was interesting to watch work at first, but then the appeal was quickly lost on Marissa after just a few minutes.

There were a few moments where her mood picked up once more, when Abigail and she were asked to pick which dress cuts or styles and colors they’d need. But after that it was just trying on outfit after outfit and sitting around while Ms. DuMaurier put about a million pins everywhere in the fabric.

Marissa entertains herself a bit wondering how in the world Abigail will get out of the dress without getting poked, before Ms. DuMaurier adds even *more* pins and turns Marissa’s idle pondering into genuine confusion and trepidation.

Ms. DuMaurier takes a step back just as Marissa is about to give voice to her concerns, as if appraising, before she nods definitively to herself and walks around Abigail once, twice, three times. She stops, closes her eyes, and when she opens them she’s a flurry of energy as she quickly unpins the whole thing to practically yank it off of Abigail and jot down hasty notes and begin cutting fabric. Then the jerky, halting grind of an ancient sewing machine starts up.

Abigail wobbles and awkwardly tries to cover herself in the wake of the swarm. Even though she’s only in her concealing undergarments, Marissa turns her face away and reaches beside her to offer the shirt and trousers Abigail had taken off in the adjoined changing room. Marissa keeps her eyes averted and battles to wrangle her blush under control until Abigail drops herself into the seat beside her, balling herself up as small as she possibly can.

Marissa indulges her, and they sit in silence for a few minutes until Ms. DuMaurier summons Abigail once more to undress and try on the altered dress. She tutts at the fit and pins it again before yanking the thing off Abigail, leaving her once more exposed and the both of them with rouged cheeks.

This process repeats at least three more times before Ms. DuMaurier finally deems the fit good, and her services in danger of being terminated under Marissa’s wrathful glare at their treatment. She’s distracted from enacting vengeance, however, when Abigail smooths her hands down her sides and steps into Marissa’s line of sight, turning in front of the full length mirror, and considering herself.

Marissa's breath catches in her throat, and Abigail's head wrenches over her shoulder at the sound.

"What is it? Is the dress, does it..." Abigail starts, cripplingly self conscious after the events of the past few hours.

"No you, you look...stunning." Marissa breathes. She looks like royalty, like a duchess, like a-

Like a princess.

Maybe...what if...could she-

"Really?" Abigail looks shocked and hopeful, like someone just told her the sky was orange and every time she winked they'd give her a puppy.

"Really." Marissa can't believe Abigail can't see herself the way Marissa does, she must be blind if she doesn't realize how amazing she looks.

Abigail smiles, a small, disbelieving yet pleased thing.

Marissa returns it tenfold.

They board *The Zephyrus* that night with a trunk full of four more dresses that weren't tailored exactly, but were close enough approximations from Ms. DuMaurier's stores to fit Abigail nicely, as well as one tailored suit that cost more than the fare of the ferry.

But it was well worth the indignation burning in Ms. DuMaurier's eyes and the restrained joy that Abigail tried to hide, her hands discreetly shaking when she saw the velvety colors put reverently away in their box. Marisa found that she liked the buying things for Abigail. It was also especially gratifying to see Frederick struggle in hauling the extravagant trunk over the loading plank, and to hear Abigail giggle softly all the way to their quarters.

They share a room once more here, and Marissa is surprised, if a bit worried, that they're only afforded a small bed. Upon opening the door and discovering this critical detail, Abigail shucks in a breath and turns to Marissa with a look she can't quite identify.

"Can we,-"

"Are you-"

"-I mean I'd be-"

"-Sure you don't want-"

"-Fine with it if-"

"-Me to sleep on the-"

They both stop when they realize how ridiculous the conversation is getting, waiting for the other to speak first.

Marissa lets out a nervous chuckle. “I’d be alright if you were.”

“I’m alright with it.” Abigail breathes out in a rush.

“Alright, Teacup.”

Abigail’s already crossed through the threshold into the cabin and blushes bright red at the endearment.

“Why do you keep calling me that?” She huffs as Marissa shuts the door.

“Why do I call you what?” Marissa decides on playing dumb.

“Teacup. Ever since we met you just won’t let up. Why?” She sits down, slowly, in a deceptively graceful motion on the edge of the bed.

Marissa considers her question and the repercussions of responding honestly. She sits as well, next to Abigail, and swipes her tongue over her bottom lip before opening her mouth to respond. Then closing it, and opening it again.

“Because, when I first saw you, you looked like you were cracking. In your eyes, I mean. Like a teacup. I, well, I thought you might break...”

She directs her gaze down at where her hands twist in her lap, “...and I found that...I didn’t want you to.” There, there it was. Out in the world.

Too late, Marissa realizes she’s finally pushed them to confront the great expanse of untread territory between them. This is where one of them scatters or lunges. Marissa doesn’t know yet whether she regrets it or not, just that her stomach is twisting into painful knots and this is making her more nervous than...well, nothing can spring to mind quickly enough of the same magnitude that Abigail has proven herself of having on Marissa’s previously peaceful life of crime. Perhaps the only gem of truthful emotions to drop itself into the rocky expanse of Marissa’s deceit filled life.

The pause lingers long enough for Marissa to want to claw her eyes out, and maybe even her tongue. She doesn’t dare look up from where she’s carefully cataloguing the exact arch of Abigail's cuticles to gauge her reaction. Insult? Anger? Sadness?

After what feels like hours, Abigail clears her throat and asks; “What would you have done if I didn’t accept the job?” She speaks carefully, her vowels dipping softly, and the seemingly non-sequitur question jarrs Marissa into risking a glance at her face. It’s inscrutable, no luck.

Only one way to go, you dug your grave Marissa, now listen to the eulogy.

“I don’t know.” And she doesn’t. But Abigail is looking at her with a blank face and her eyes reflect some small longing, so Marissa says farewell to her heart and starts preparing herself to live life as a hermit once they’ve reached land.

“But...I’m glad you did. I don’t think I could’ve ever been as fulfilled as you’ve made me these past few weeks in my whole life.” -Oh *fuck* she’s gone to far, and for a moment Marissa flounders internally to redirect the serious tone of the confession into something lighter and less clingy- “Or could’ve have made it this far without such a conniving partner in crime such as yourself, Teacup.”

Abigail's face breaks out into one of her heart-clenchingingly beautiful smiles, and she laughs. The combined action seems to Marissa like a quiet sunrise, earth-shattering and yet holding enough magnitude to fortify and soothe. Marissa laughs a little too, her stomach roiling with bittersweet hope.

“Thank you. You don’t know how much you’ve done for me.” The ‘How much I appreciate it’ goes unsaid, and leaves Abigail's eyes a little sad and far away.

“It’s okay. I’m glad I can help.” Marissa’s voice comes out softly, aiming to soothe, and Abigail turns her head back to face her. Without realizing it, Marissa’s traitorous hand reaches up to cup the smooth curve of Abigail's cheek to comfort her.

And here, Marissa finally registers how closely they’re sitting, just a hair's breath away from being pressed against each other. How intimately suggestive her hand placements are. She’s just began to overanalyze the scant empty space between them before looking up when Abigail calls her name, barely a whisper, yet Marissa reacts instantly (how could she not?).

Their faces hover just inches apart. Their breaths mingle, shared. Marissa’s not sure who leaned in first, or who closed their eyes first, or who reached out for the others hand, except they’re *kissing*, and it’s so fucking *sweet* that Marissa thinks her teeth might fall out of her mouth and rot in her hands. Abigail tastes like the crêpes they’d picked up before boarding - the flavor is better on her lips, Marissa thinks, as she swipes her tongue to catch the lingering remnants of caramelized sugar before Abigail steals her tongue back - and it’s probably, no, *definitely*, the best kiss she’s ever had.

Abigail's mouth is impossibly soft, and she makes this quiet hum in the back of her throat that sends shivers down Marissa’s spine and butterflies rioting in her stomach. They end up tangled in a heap on the bed, just hands clutching at each other, smushed noses and cheeks and smiles.

She really does look like a princess.

Oh my god, Marissa just kissed a *princess*.

And she did it again.

Chapter End Notes

Abigail would give a good eulogy, I think. Lot of depth and tortured prose there.

Your comments jump up and down screaming, your kudos are in shock, internally squealing.

But just the thought is enough

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will are back :D

remember when I mentioned trauma and lack of communication? Oh, why am I bringing that up now? No particular reason.....

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will shucks off his linen shirt with a particular venom unusual to him. He stomps around their bedroom as much as he can, flinging his clothes in the vague direction of the wicker basket by the dresser, and missing by a considerable amount, before breezing to the washroom. Hannibal flinches slightly from his place in the doorway when he hears the marble vanity clink loudly and the over enthusiastic splash of water. He has no doubt that Will is making a mess out of spite.

Sighing inaudibly, he turns to rid himself of his own day clothes and picks up after his husband's trail. He's just finished folding Will's balled-up shirt and slacks in the dirty linen basket, when he hears Will huff in annoyance and stalk to the bed.

Looking up, Hannibal catalogues the flushed pink of his face from a mixture of scrubbing and bright anger. His ears are still dripping and the errant curls by his hairline have matted to his forehead. His fiery mood has died from earlier, but his lips are still set in a subtle moue of discontent and the space between his eyebrows is furrowed. Hannibal has not given up the urge to smooth it out since he was a young man, though the line has long since deepened into a wrinkle, despite his best efforts.

Will sits on the bed with a soft 'hmpf' and turns away from Hannibal were he stands. Unfortunately for him, the armoir and basket are on Will's side of the bedroom. Hannibal takes his time straightening every item inside and out of both furnishings, before journeying to assess the damage done to the adjoining washroom. Bottles flung across the floor, the bowl of water nearly tipped over, towels askew. Thankfully, he hadn't upended the contents of anything and there were no other liquids anywhere they shouldn't be, aside from some small puddles of water.

After meticulously putting everything back in its place, and washing up in what little was left in the basin, he grabs the jar of Will's ointment and some gauze wrap, extinguishing the gas lamp illuminating the room when he finally exits.

Will is sulking - it seems to be the only way to describe his mood - on the bed. He's lying down, but his arms are still defiantly crossed over his chest and his face is turned away from

the dresser still.

Hannibal is unfettered, outwardly, and makes his way to the bed with as much grace and dignity as he can project. He sits gently on the edge of the bed, and brings Will's leg into his lap to apply the ointment. He hisses slightly at the temperature and the pain, as he does every night, but Hannibal soon smooths the ache from his muscles and the ointment warms under his dexterous fingers. Several minutes pass, only marked by Will's deepening breaths and the slow releasing of his muscles.

By the time Hannibal bundles the compression wrap up Will's calf to rest at his knee, he's more drowsy than he is angry.

Hannibal sits back up from his bent posture, balancing the jar on the nightstand before brushing the hair from Will's forehead. He admires his husband's features, before bending to kiss his forehead, and is allowed with only a slight frown.

"You'll catch your death if you keep getting your hair so wet every night."

"Mmph..." Will responds, sleepy and slurred. He turns on his side away from Hannibal's part of the bed, and towards the armoir once more, in a sluggishly determined motion.

Hannibal manages to huff a small laugh, before heaving himself up to make the short walk around the end of the bed to settle in on his side, and on his way he extinguishes the rest of the lights in the room to enshroud them in darkness. He slides closer to the center of the bed at seeing how far over to the edge Will has placed himself, and he flips the blanket to tuck it up around his husband's neck.

After a few moments Will sighs and turns back around to shuffle into Hannibal's embrace. Still restless and sluggishly frustrated, he's so close to sleep but can't quite reach it without the comfort of Hannibal's arms. And, truthfully, neither can Hannibal. Cementing one of the reasons they always sleep either near each other or in the same bed, needing the touch of the other to fall asleep, and to be reassured if one wakes from nightmares of rocky midnight escapes and the crack of a sword that the other is still there, still *alive.*

Hannibal tightens his grip on Will, and he makes a soft sound in response. As soon as Hannibal registers what he's done, he releases his fingers to smooth his palms down gently and release any tension he's caused.

Will sighs, and brings his hand up to Hannibal's chest, resting it just above his heart. The tip of his index finger taps with the beat: one-two, one-two, one-two.

Eventually his finger slows, and stops altogether. His husband's features smoothen slightly, and the furrow disappears. Hannibal stays up for much longer, as he usually does, going through the events of the day and what's to be done tomorrow and in the future to avoid setting Will off as he had today. He puzzles minutely over just what exactly he had done to upset him so.

Will was in lighter spirits this past morning, he had joined Hannibal in a small walk, and they had breakfast together for the first time that week. They'd read outside for a while, and went

on a short walk when Will's leg had cramped slightly. His mood took a sudden change when they ventured inside to Hannibal's study nearing noon. He'd grown snippy, and more rude with each minute that passed despite Hannibal's confusion and attempts at placation.

Hannibal was in the middle of thoroughly examining the scene in his study for any major tells in his mind's eye, when Will brought him back to the present.

"I can hear you thinking, Hannibal." His voice was tired and scratchy, rumbling through his hand into Hannibal's chest, where he felt the echoing reverberations.

"My apologies, dearest. Go to sleep." Will chokes out an indignant laugh, short and more of a gruff exhalation that was but a shell of one of Will's actual guffaws.

"I tried. But you stopped me with your loud thoughts. Out with it so we can both get some rest." He seems mellowed from close contact and time.

Hannibal considers his options, weighing whether or not he will lose ground or gain anything from asking what was really on his mind.

"No lies." Will reminds him when he ponders rising eventualities for a few moments too long.

Hannibal reaches down to the hand resting over his heart, and brings it up to his lips to kiss each knuckle reverently, "Of course not, dear Will."

Some seconds pass quietly before Hannibal carefully airs his question, half hoping Will might've drifted back to sleep, though knowing full well that he hadn't.

"What had upset you so thoroughly today?"

Will's eyes pop open, he tenses slightly, and shifts in place where he lies. The compounded motion equivalent to pacing and waving one's hands in dismissal only serves to narrow Hannibal's eyes and raise a slightly critical eyebrow. Will pulls his hand from his grasp, where Hannibal had been thoughtlessly stroking the tendons and veins running through it. Hannibal worries for a moment that he's crossed some invisible line that has been laid, and that Will might turn over and grow stony tomorrow.

Instead, against all his predictions, Will just hovers his hand back above Hannibal's heart and idly chews his lip. Hannibal waits patiently, allowing Will a careful scrutiny of his husband's features, making an effort to project his feelings on his face and not to hide his intentions.

Slowly, Will relaxes his muscles one by one, and he closes his eyes. After a few weighted moments elapse, Hannibal believes the matter to be over. That is, until Will breaks the silence that's settled peacefully over them once more.

"Do you know why I spend so much time in the garden?" Hannibal's eyes open, and before he can even begin composing a reply to the odd question, Will continues.

"It's not because of her. Well, it is, and it isn't." Hannibal's arm twitches at the mention of their daughter, and he gets caught for a moment on the fact that Will had mentioned her

seemingly unprompted, despite how he'd always avoided the subject of her.

"That night, when everything started, right at the beginning, they set off those smoke bombs and cannons, and we couldn't see anything." Hannibal remembers it very clearly, the image Will describes coming to mind quickly, flashing before his eyes in agonizing detail.

"And that smell- I didn't particularly register it at first but, later, when we were in that godforsaken wagon, that blanket was just saturated in the shit. And it was *so strong*, I felt like I was choking. Even after we'd left, after I got a breath of fresh air, I still felt like I was going to suffocate. I just can't *stand* that smell."

Hannibal freezes, the senses flooding back to him as well, and the day clicks into place in front of him. Days, months, years before as well, unexpected protests and changes in Will's demeanor now made sense. It seemed that every time he lit a fire, Will would retreat from him just quick as any mention of *her.*

So distracted was he, in protecting his husband and finding some occupation for his idle mind, that Hannibal couldn't fathom a reason for the times when his husband would disappear into himself unexpectedly, or leave his arms to wallow outside for hours on end.

"But the garden is just fresh air," He continues, "And sometimes, if I stare into the rose bushes long enough, my vision will blur and I forget the smell of smoke..." His voice cracks somewhere near the end, and he has to pause to finish the thought. "Eventually, I always expect her to come running out from around them. And I *know,* somewhere, in the clinically logical recesses of my mind, that she won't, but I always end up back there. Back in the Old Garden."

Hannibal's breath leaves him in a rush, he threads his fingers through Will's hair and brings his weary head to rest in the crease of his sternum. Will shucks in a surprised gasp of air, and after a moments' hesitation he's clutching back, hard.

Hannibal is whispering near incoherent apologies and endearments, they're all blending together and rushing through without any thought of lucidity or poetics. He swears up and down how he'll have those new gas stoves installed and that he's going to get rid of every fireplace from the house.

Will's breathing is shaky and neither mention how damp each other's hair has gotten, never mind how they sniff and their chests rattle wetly.

After the worst of it has passed, and neither are rocking with the weights of their chests and the force of their emotions, one or the other pulls back far enough to rest their foreheads together.

They're far too old to comfortably hold each other as they do, too soon their bones protest and they must loosen their hold on the other. Hannibal swipes his hand through Will's hair and the other thumbs away his tears. Will's knuckles catch any that leak from Hannibal's eyes, and his own are downcast.

It strikes Hannibal that Will held this from him in shame, and once more does Hannibal want to try to merge himself and his husband together through sheer force. He can't find any words to communicate how wrong he was, so he just tucks them together as close as they can be and hopes that it would convey his sentiments.

Eventually, when their faces have dried, Hannibal succumbs to the cloying, exhausted relaxation that fills one when they've successfully emptied their soul through their eyes. He can see Will is also suffering its effects, and their hands roam slightly, now far past desperate for contact.

Curled around Will, he slips into unconsciousness before Hannibal confirms for himself that Will had fallen asleep before him, something he'd never done since the night they'd first shared a bed together.

Hannibal woke tenderly the next morning, his head pounding. He'd slept heavily the night before, but at least Will hadn't left his side. This assumption is quickly interrupted when Hannibal finds that not only is there a lack of warmth at his side, but when he outstretches his arm his reach is unhindered. He sits up in a bumbling panic when he realizes this. Just as quickly as the panic had come, it subsides minutely when he registers the slow plink of a gentle stream of liquid and searches for the source.

Will eyes him in bleary amusement from where he's relieving himself in their chamber pot. He finishes up before shoving it under their bed with a careful foot and crawls back under the covers to lay for a few more minutes, or hours, if Hannibal is honest, together.

Hannibal's heart is still rabbiting in his chest, so Will pulls his head over with a hand at his nape to rest over his heart. His husband's arms reel him in further until he's half on top of Will and he runs a hand through Hannibal's silvering hair. Hannibal breathes easy, absorbing and internalizing the shame of his foolish fumbling, before releasing them.

They lay together counting each other's breaths, the only form of time that existed in this precious space being the rise and fall of Will's chest, and the methodical sweep and gentle scratch of his fingers in Hannibal's hair.

Eventually, they relocate to the sitting room when they're ready to let the other go for just a few scant minutes.

It's the only accommodation room in the whole house that doesn't have a fireplace, bedroom besides.

Hannibal has opened the tall windows that face the garden and put on a record. Will sits reclining on the edge of the long chaise, head turned away from Hannibal and into the breeze that flows in from the window, eyes closed. Hannibal sits across from him, and can barely see the profile of his face, only the edge of his mouth and the curve of his nose.

Hannibal has brought his sketchbook to sit with, and begins a piece of his handsome model. It's a quiet, late morning, with the only noise being the distant chirping of birds, and the soft, scratchy record. Will insisted Hannibal bought it when they'd first moved, after they'd discovered that the unforgiving seats of the local Opera houses lent themselves to uncomfortable, painful performances for him. Neither Hannibal nor Will had returned to any live performance since then, Will out of apprehension and Hannibal out of his refusal to leave Will's side.

So they settled on the odd, distorted things borne of man's curiosity and the desire to capture and preserve life. They really couldn't capture the exhilaration that *L'amour est un oiseau rebelle* or Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* held. The orchestra was quiet and slightly distorted by static, unable to project across the room in swelling grace and emotion.

Hannibal is relieved when the contraption screeches and the diminuendo chops into repetitive blips so that he can finally turn the thing off.

When he returns to his seat, He resumes his idle sketching, and decides to add some charcoals to get the exact dark swirl of Will's curls. He alternates between gazing softly at his husband, and remembering to add to the drawing, lest the crumbs of his charcoal stick gather and smear the paper from where he holds it poised aloft and ready.

Nearly finished, his budding sentimentality overtakes him. Briefly contemplating, he abruptly curves the side of his renditions' mouth into a tender smile, hidden away into the breeze. Hannibal gazes down at this new paramour before discarding the whole thing with an odd tightness coiling in the hollow of his ribs.

He flips to a new page, and his fingers easily trace through the vague outline of a swan. An easy, graceful animal that Hannibal has long since mastered drawing, and falls back to when he's frustrated or dissatisfied with an artwork. Hannibal is more frustrated when he does so, knowing that it won't be a challenge to him, and is a sort of repetitive skill that does him no good. He resolves to make it the best swan he's drawn yet.

The motion of Will turning his body towards Hannibal snatches his attention, as does the heavy sound that falls from his lips. Looking up from his soon-to-be masterpiece, he registers a sort of melancholy determination to his husbands features.

Will's shoulders are set in a straight line, his back rises from its hunch into a high born posture that he was neither born into or taught to present as a young boy. His chin is clenched and hands are white knuckled in his trousers. Hannibal sets aside his sketch pad and settles at the end of his seat, curious and a tad bit uneasy.

Visibly resolving himself, Will finally turns his face to Hannibal. It takes him a few moments to bring his eyes to meet Hannibal's, but when he does, there's a flash of steely sadness in such an odd combination that Hannibal has to get up and sit by him.

He's barely just stood up when Will shucks in a quick breath and tumbles his heart into the tender space between them.

“I miss her. I miss her so much Hannibal, sometimes I think I’m dying with her.” His voice peters off at the end, confidence lost and sorrow finding its place.

Hannibal barely blinks before he’s sat beside Will and holds him tight, who heaves with gentle, quiet sobs that are so easily muffled into Hannibal’s shoulder. He regrets ever having to put his husband in a position where he had to learn how to cry softly, with little sound escaping, save the occasional shuddering gasp.

And if the guards look away in deference, afraid to make a sound, lest the shift of a shoe or creak of a door break the fragile atmosphere surrounding the grieving lords, then they are merely well trained.

Chapter End Notes

Did you really think I wouldn’t give the guards a cameo every Will/Hannibal chapter?

Your comments are crying profusely, your kudos roll their eyes at them and have to restrain themselves from doing something drastic

To bring tears to my eyes

Chapter Summary

Marissa wears a feather boa, and feelings are had between our crime wlw

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail clenches her hands in the fabric of her silk dress, nervously worrying the material for *something* to do.

Turning her head to look out the window of the automobile, she just barely stops herself from biting her bottom lip when she remembers how Marissa had smushed their lips together earlier that evening, as they were getting ready, for worrying them past the point of rough chapped-ness. Her face flushes, and Abigail is glad she's turned away from Marissa, or else she fears that she would pick up on Abigail's thoughts and really give her something to blush for.

She jumps when Marissa lays her hand over Abigail's, smoothing out her dress and idly stroking her knuckles. Abigail is suddenly incredibly self conscious of her hands - are they too damp? Why are they shaking? *Stop shaking!*

"Don't be nervous." Marissa whispers, out of earshot of their driver and Frederick up front.

"I'm not nervous." Abigail huffs, because she isn't nervous.

Marissa laughs lightly, "Of course not."

"Precisely." She responds with a sharp nod, her princess voice in place. It was high and flighty, and made her feel simultaneously playful yet haughty.

Marissa squeezes her hand in response, both a reassuring and sweet gesture. Sparing her a brief smile before turning back to the small window, Abigail considers her script for the night.

They were traveling to a small socialite party where the lords Graham-Lecter had been said to be in attendance. Frederick had mentioned some names and talked up some old friends to wrangle an invitation for the three of them.

Marissa and Frederick would introduce her, they'd make their rounds, and when they found the lords, Abigail would make her best effort to convince them she was their daughter.

She already had an advantage: her name, accent, and looks to boot. She didn't even have to lie about her story, so if they looked for any records of an 'Abigail' in republic orphanages, they'd find them. Then again, there were many girls named some variation of 'Avvigayil' in honor of the Kings, so even if she stumbled a bit, the odds of her pulling it off were still in their favor.

These thoughts had comforted her some for the past days, just as they did now, and she kept repeating them until she didn't clench Marissa's hand and her palms stopped sweating.

They round one more cobbled street, and suddenly stop in front of a grand town house, wedged between look-alikes that wound up and down the street. To Abigail, they all seem identical, each one no different to those that came before it, save for varying degrees of blatant opulence on display outside.

The automobile rumbles and puffs before going silent. And in less than a blink, Marissa rushes out of the opposite side door and around the back of the vehicle to open Abigail's door with a flourish. She bows, flicking the end of her fur boa and suit tails so they don't sweep the ground, and offers her hand to lead Abigail from her perch.

Quickly stepping down so that Marissa's hem won't suffer the muck of the side street, Abigail fondly rolls her eyes and smiles at the opulently mocking ridiculousness Marissa had, and that she'd become accustomed to.

Frederick also steps down, ruffled from the wind and drawing both their attention for his volume - he was arguing with their driver. Abigail and Marissa share a glance, and she can't decide whether to be shocked or amused.

"Well, I never!" He exclaims indignantly when their transport speeds off into the night as soon as he had dismounted.

Frederick spends the walk up to the front entrance grumbling and bemoaning modern manners, before Marissa tells him to shove it when another town car rolls up the street to stop in front of their same destination. He manages to get in one last jab at Marissa, proclaiming she's a prime example of the abandonment of said manners. Marissa sticks her tongue out at him, efficiently (and perhaps unwittingly) diffusing the tension that gathered in Abigail's stomach on the short walk up.

Frederick steps up to the painted door, where he presses the buzzer and pounds the ornately carved knocker.

After a few moments, an eccentric, slender woman opens the door, spilling light and sound onto the door step and down the street. She was laughing over her shoulder with a large glass of wine swishing in her free hand. When she turns around to face the three of them Abigail straightens up, and lifts her chin in challenge to conceal just how much she wants to shrink away.

The woman towers over the three of them, and her stylishly modern bob cut sharpens her features more than it frames her face, like it did the icons of fashion who popularized it. She

looks multitudes more fierce than any magazine model, and when her eyes come to rest on Abigail, they seem to pierce through her and size her up.

She must've done something right, because the woman smiles slightly, opens the door a little further, and offers her hand for Abigail to shake.

"Elaine Komeda, I don't believe we've met." She says, her voice is high and unusual, but far from soft in its falsetto. Abigail thinks it matches the woman perfectly.

Before she can so much as reach for her hand in return and introduce herself, Marissa butts in and offers Abigail's own introduction in her place, grasping the proffered hand with enough force to visibly startle the woman.

"Oh it's so nice to meet you, this is Avvigayil, *Graham-Lecter*, we believe. My acquaintance and I have undertaken the role of her escorts and wish to introduce her to the Lords-"

"Oh, is that what you're here for?" Mrs Komeda's face hardens at the mention of the Graham-Lecters, and her expression turns more and more severe the longer Marissa talks. She practically rips her hand from Marissa's enthusiastic grip.

"Yes, in fact, Elaine, if you would be so kind as to-" Frederick starts, sensing the quick decline of the conversation.

Mrs. Komeda turns her attention to Frederick, and her gaze morphs into something withering.

"I expected this of some despicable hoodlum, but not you, Frederick. What has become of you?" Her words are clipped, minced in order to hurt, and judging by the flinch she elicits in response from Frederick, the mark has landed.

"Elaine, I-" Frederick says, only to be cut off by Marissa, "Mrs. Komeda, we-".

The hand that holds her tumbler of wine cuts through the air in a precise motion to stop them from speaking, without spilling a drop, and she sighs long-sufferingly through her nose.

Closing her eyes in a long blink, Mrs. Komeda seems weary. She opens them to turn to Abigail once more, with a more critical glint in her eyes.

"Tell me, for certain, are you Avvigayil?" She says, quiet and determined.

Abigail is shocked by it slightly, the one question she practiced to prove indirectly for weeks yet hadn't prepared for in such a blunt form.

"I-, well, yeah-" She responds breathily, stumbling over her words. Not at all like a princess, and not at all confident.

"That's what I thought." Mrs. Komeda waves her hand again in a halt sign to someone over Abigail's shoulder, and she hears the recent arrival behind her mumble something about a 'Freddie Lounds' and 'the lengths she'll go to for an exposé'.

Bone tired and jaw locked, she speaks again, after taking a fortifying sip from her wine. “I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

Frederick splutters for in response, and Marissa’s voice rises in volume. Abigail is stunned into silence.

“Please, leave. Your presence is unwanted, not to mention the Graham-Lecters will not even be in attendance tonight.”

The guests behind them tsk, murmuring about vultures and the leeches that some peasants can be. Abigail is flushed full of shame, suddenly she wants to be anywhere but here, ashamed that she ever thought she had it in herself to pull something like this off.

Marissa is trying to argue with Mrs. Komeda, drawing the attention of not only the guests inside, but the servants as well.

“You don’t understand, she-” Marissa waves at Abigail, “-really *is* Princess Avvigayil!”

“No, what *you* don’t understand is how despicable people like you are, capitalizing on the already fragile sentiments of grieving parents who can’t even mourn in peace because there are a thousand of you roaches-”, Mrs. Komeda parrots Marissa’s wave, sweeping over the three of them with a derisive flick of her wrist, “-who re-open the wounds of their suffering. All for what, some cash?” She laughs, the furthest thing from joyful, mockingly harsh and it grates Abigail's ears. “Well, I’ll let you in on a little secret; there *is* no reward money. That’s just some hoax Lounds spread as incentive for more impersonators.”

“But-!” Marissa tries once more.

“Leave, now, or you will be forced to.” Mrs. Komeda’s voice is as strong as steel now, cutting through protests with the sharpness of honed glass. Those behind them give voice to the same sentiments, in varying degrees of venom, adding some insults to the mix.

“Come on Marissa, let’s just go.” Abigail tries, desperate to leave the cloud of disdain and anger directed at them.

“No! You are the real princess and they need to know that!” Marissa begins facing her, then turns to whip her head around towards their opponents.

In the span of less than a second, Mrs. Komeda narrows her eyes and turns to summon someone behind her. Two burly men wearing bland serving uniforms lumber through the door to manhandle them away. They’re shoved through the small crowd behind them, and Abigail keeps her eyes trained on the ground, for fear that they’ll see through her painted face and silk gown to the little girl who ran away from a rickety orphanage, and has memorized the different textures of blood and tears.

Marissa fights their rough escorts off valiantly, struggling and kicking, while Frederick is as limp and curtailed as a kitten picked up by the skin of its neck. Abigail is much the same, but she kicks her legs futilely in an effort to at least touch down on the ground and walk with some dignity.

They're taken a few blocks before being dropped off, barely intact in front of gaping onlookers. Marissa straightens out quickly, before turning around to hurl swears wildly at the quickly retreating backs of the men.

Abigail fusses with her dress in a deliberate action to avoid the jeers and gawking attention they've drawn. It's beyond her help now, wrinkled and speckled with watery flecks of mud from the stomping journey. Marissa is still snapping and Frederick looks ruffled beyond belief when she gains the courage to look above anyone's knees.

"I can't believe what just happened, this is unbelievable!" Marissa manages after she wears out her list of combined curses.

When they discover none of them know exactly where they are, Marissa suggests, through feral tangents, that they should go for a walk, preferably straight back down the road and up to the townhouse for a fistfight with Mrs. Komeda. Frederick objects, rather vehemently, saying they should just wait while he calls for a cab and they can sort everything else when they get back to the hotel. They're both in an arguing mood, already riled up, and Abigail finally interjects suggesting that she and Marissa go for a walk just round the block and back for a cool down while they wait for him to call a cab.

Both Marissa and Frederick are begrudging in their acceptance of the compromise, aware of the wisdom of it and the help it would lend their temperaments, willing to split up and adhere to it.

Marissa walks fast, in long, sweeping strides, the way she does when she's frustrated. Abigail struggles to keep up and finally laces their hands together to try and pull back her pace. It ends up halting her altogether, and Abigail jerks in surprise.

They make an odd picture, Abigail realizes, both in formal evening attire on a dirty sidewalk in downtown Paris.

"Slow down, it's a beautiful night, Marissa." She offers in some explanation, hoping to draw something, anything, out of Marissa.

Marissa chews at the side of her thumb absentmindedly, before grunting in response.

"Sorry, I just still can't believe that stuck up bitch *did* that!"

Abigail flinches inwardly at the profane insult, before trying to defend the odd woman who saw through her, into her, so quickly. Somehow, she had reluctantly empathized with her and understood her standing. Even respected her, especially for her grit and how tough she was.

"I don't know, I think I kinda understand why-"

"Oh my god, what are you even saying? Do you even want to pull this off?"

"Yeah, well, I....I don't know right now." Abigail weakly responds. When she'd agreed to this the endgame seemed like an abstract concept, fooling some rich Lords out of their fortune and calling it a day. Really she just needed a fast way to get away from that damn manor and

the forest where she'd been chased like a deer by a hunter. Having to face the fallout and convince someone who cared for the people she was going to try and deceive...was different than what she'd expected.

"What do you mean *you don't know*?" Marissa slips her hand out of Abigail's and turns to face her fully. She has Marissa's full attention, but maybe not the kind she wanted, not under these circumstances.

"I...I feel different after actually...trying. To fool someone."

"Oh, well tough luck, Abigail, you're gonna have to get over it!" Her voice is gradually raising in annoyance. Abigail hates it, hates being the center of the anger that's been mounting in her all night.

"You don't understand, its just different! You heard what Mrs. Komeda said, about the Graham-Lecters. It feels... *I* feel immoral." She manages, voice pitching higher as it does when she's getting worked up, and volume raising to match Marissa's. She pauses to collect herself, and tacks on quietly at the end to answer the astonished anger on Marissa's face, "...Dirty."

"Oh, like you're some upstanding paragon of 'morals', you're the one who volunteered for this! You practically begged to be in on it!"
Marissa's almost shouting, and her voice is infused with venom, she's trying to hurt Abigail.

It's working. "That's not my point! I feel bad knowing it's..." She starts, unsure of her point, but sure of her feelings and determined to defend herself.

"What, 'real people' you're fooling?" Marissa completes in a way that's closer to mocking than it is a genuine offer.

Abigail opens her mouth, but no sound comes out. It fits, almost. She doesn't like that her actions would be hurting two people who were relatively innocent. Who were already suffering. Who conjured an odd pang of numb pain in her chest.

Abigail knew a lot about suffering.

"Are you kidding me? Abigail, wake up! Did you really think that you'd be facing a pair of stone statues?" Her voice is so filled with disdain, so uncaring, that it hits Abigail like a punch to the gut.

It's suddenly a lot harder to see, and Abigail has to blink multiple times to clear the glaze on her eyes. She sniffs before she can find it in herself to respond, but Marissa barrels onward.

"This is the real deal. *God, I can't believe you're backing out when we've come this far. I thought you were made of tougher stuff, Teacup." At hearing her endearment weaponized and spat like it was, Abigail's eyes brim over and tears cascade down her face.*

Marissa sighs at the sight of them, and aims straight for the jugular. "Maybe... it was a mistake to bring you on." She sounds pitiful, something Abigail used to think she was

incapable of feeling for her, it was one of the reasons she really liked Marissa.

Abigail nods and chokes out a response; “Maybe it was. I’m sorry I *burdened* you with my weakness.”

“That’s not what I meant, Abigail.”

“Wasn’t it?” Her voice breaks pitifully, and Abigail turns away so Marissa won’t have to look at her no-doubt ugly, snotty, red face; so she won’t have to see the way that pitymorphs Marissa's features. The only emotion she’d never seen, nor ever wanted to see, make its way across Marissa’s face. Abigail tips her head down so that her hair covers her face and shadows it from the occasional passer-by.

When Frederick arrives in front of them in a taxi, after what feels like hours of winter chill and cold silence, he starts admonishing the pair for deviating from the plan before halting when he sees Abigail's crumbled face and hunched shoulders. He communicates silently with Marissa in some way, through her watery eyes Abigail sees him glance over her shoulder and have some sort of conversation using only his eyes and mouthed words. After a moment, he gently corrals her into the back and gets in behind her, graciously leaving her with space and turning away from her.

Abigail didn’t realize Marissa hadn’t rode with them until they arrive back at the hotel they were all staying at. She tries to convince herself that she doesn’t care, that she was thankful for the time away from Marissa, but when she sees their queen bed made from the two twins pushed together, she can’t help but feel a hollow ringing in her mind. Idly aching for some response.

Now, she is jarred by her attachment. Now, Abigail debates cutting it out like a parasite, before it spreads too far to risk it without death.

It’s late when Marissa returns back to the hotel, feet aching, and bitterly cross with herself. She feels foolish for being so childishly hurtful and belligerent in her swirl of mounting anger.

After ambling around the city for hours, returning to their room makes her feel like she’s a sinner entering hallowed ground. It’s close enough to the truth, and Marissa winces at the loud clack of the closing door behind her. Abigail lays unmoving in bed, a frozen lump that rises and falls only slightly. She’s so close to the edge, almost about to fall off, but Marissa is glad to see her at all. Even if the two beds were once more separated.

At least she was in the bed and not on the plush chair, or lying on the floor. Marissa keeps her eyes glued to her blanketed form as she gets ready to watch over her in the opposite bed, still afraid she'd gone and fucked it all up.

Well, she had, but she just wanted one last moment, always greedy for the time Abigail spared her. Marissa hates that she made her cry. Hates herself for it, but she's still left too frustrated at the whole night to fully admit to herself she was in the wrong.

But at least she could tell Abigail.

She gingerly gets into bed, mirroring Abigail by settling as close as she could to the edge of the bed without falling off. Marissa resolved to stay up the whole night and confront her when she wakes, intent on apologizing and fixing the mess she's made. Laying there for a moment, staring at the defensive curl of Abigail's back, closed in on herself, Marissa forces herself to remember what she'd done. How terrible she'd been, what an awful person she is. She has to at least apologize to the person who deserves it, this being the only time she's ever meant it.

"I'm sorry. I'm so, so *sorry* Abigail. I didn't mean it."

Abigail doesn't respond. She doesn't even shift. Marissa rolls over to face the wall, and counts all the crinkles in the wall paper instead of all the ways she's fucked everything up. (Until everything fades to black, and she's unable to register the creaking of the bedsprings across from her, dipping under the shifting weight of her companion, failing once more at the only goddamn task she'd set for herself.)

Chapter End Notes

Here's a link to a song that I thought applied to the chapter, but the original jazz/blues version was a little too peppy and didn't fit with the mood. Also, you're gonna wanna immediately stop the random playlist after you've heard the song because everything else after is- it's pretty rough.

Your comments scream at Marissa, your kudos have to hold them back from hurting the characters or kidnapping Abigail.

And remind me (Of the time I knew)

Chapter Summary

Let’s check in with Abigail.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail sits up in bed, and contemplates her options. One thing is clear, she needs to get away from here - from Marissa - as quickly as possible. Her heart twinges when she glances at the figure across the room. Marissa must be fast asleep, and Abigail isn’t sure she would go through with this if she wasn’t.

The window is sealed shut, Abigail checked earlier that day. The banister and terrace with its glass doors creak too loudly, and the scaffolding too weak for her to climb down. That leaves the main door....which is locked.

And Marissa has the key.

Abigail had seen her slide the room key under their - no, *her* - pillow every night, even when she used to be too preoccupied in keeping the both of them quite occupied with each other.

Abigail feels a familiar, though jarring, numbness creep through her at the memory. Her hands clutch her night gown where she’s pulled her knees up to her chest. She’s hardly attempting a daring escape for her life, but then again, Abigail doesn’t think she’d survive the heartbreak to come if she stayed here.

Marissa had spelled it out for Abigail, besides. She’d shoved her face in it. Was it so hard to come to terms with the possibility that this didn’t mean to Marissa what it did to Abigail? Marissa was free, wild, and unburdened by her passion, and Abigail had once thought her more than base needs and desire. After their argument (their fight, it was a *fight*), Abigail thinks she should have seen it sooner. She shouldn’t have let herself become so vulnerable, let down her walls so quickly to grass green eyes and dimpled smiles. The aqua pits of her soul where much shallower than Abigail had once dreamed, for the color was so dark in the afternoon sun that she thought, surely, she could drown her life in such beauteous and dangerous depths. Now, she can see the slick bottom covered with dark algae. When she reached more than a cautious toe into the tepid waters, Abigail found, clearly before her senses, the mud caked through the edges. And her eyes, disillusioned after the shock, opened to see a surrounding more akin to a puddle than a pond, the nature of the trick burning shame through Abigail.

Quickly, before she loses her courage, she slips down from her huddle to creep across the scant space separating the beds to ease a hand under Marissa’s pillow. Abigail deliberately

avoids looking at her face, instead focusing on the way the fabric writhes under her searching hand.

Tendrils of inky black hair fall on top of the folds Abigail tries to study. She's caught between the *then*, when she had combed grasping fingers through the deceptively silky strands, and the *now*, that she'd just seen the same dark tendrils whipped around in the wind to frame Marissa's painfully condescending features. Dark and haloed in the glowing light of the street lamp, Abigail relives the moment and it's ethereal quality. Untouched and pure at its base, raw, roots, she dwells in the dull ache of pain the new memory elicits before shoving and crushing down her feelings. No time for them now, they are an inconvenience she can't master or wield to her advantage.

Marissa's breath hardly hitches, still slow and deep (and *indifferent, some small voice murmurs in the back of her mind) when Abigail's fingers connect with the warmed iron of the room key. She pulls her closed fist back, greedy with the gift she'd stolen and grim with the knowledge of what's to come. Desperate for lonely, rosy sunsets and isolation, Abigail clumsily stumbles back, only stopping long enough to reach for her bag and stuff any wayward clothes inside.*

Shucking off her sleek sleeping gown, she pulls on a pair of plain, mud stained trousers and some shirt that had lain in a wrinkled heap on the floor. She's barely through the door before she realizes it's Marissa's, and clutches it tighter around herself while blinking confused tears from her eyes.

The scant stragglers in the hotel lobby give her a mix of curious and lewd glances. Abigail fishes a coat - the thickest she can feel for - out of her bag and pulls it over her shoulders, using it like armor to bolster herself. There's a messenger style cap in the pocket, and Abigail blinks twice in front of a concerned doorman and the extravagant doors of the hotel before she shoves it down hard over her face, 'till her ears stop it from going any further.

Thankfully, the doorman, paid not to interact with guests, only silently opens the door, smelling excessively of coffee.

Now on the street in the middle of the night, Abigail is once more confronted with the difference of her life compared to that of the urbanized Parisian. The odd automobile still rattles on by, and some are brave enough to walk the streets, few though they are. It's almost a shock, compared to the loud stillness of the forests and villages in her old life.

Abigail thinks she feels the eyes of the passers-by trace her, the oddly underdressed girl with her wrinkled and frayed clothes. She pulls her cap down further so it eclipses her face and falls past her ears, wrapping the open ends of the coat around her torso as she paces down the street.

The bitter cold of the night catches up with her, and she's thrown for a split second at the lack of snow. At the orphanage, the weather hardly needed to drop five degrees for sleet, hail, or a scant 3 inches of silt to inconvenience everyone. Ever since she was young, Abigail used to hate the snow, so the long winters were a lesson in tolerating the lesser evils of the world. She can't tell if she'd want it to blanket the atmosphere here for some sense of familiarity, or if it would further agitate her.

Increasing her brisk pace down the block, Abigail curses under her fogged breath about the cold. Her shoes clack loudly on the cobbled stones, only serving to make her curse louder and walk faster.

Abigail adjusts the strap of her bag, and the angle of her cap blinds her to the drunk stumbling her way. They crash arms, no more than clipping by each other, yet her heart stutters and a litany of slurred swears spill from his lips. The force with which they collide wrenches her shoulder around, but he keeps on past, stumbling and swaying and cursing. The after smell of his breath carried the stench of bad booze and she's only taken two more steps back when she freezes in shock.

He didn't speak French, that was her native tongue she'd just heard. The familiar swears, spat with an all too familiar venom.

Abigail is confronted with a vivid recollection of how Mr. Hobbs would curse under his breath with each swing of his shovel following storms and the newly blanketed orphanage pathway. The eyes crawling across her back morph into deep black pits, and she shivers with a chill, irrelevant to the wind.

Gaze searching from under the low dip of her cap, Abigail frantically looks for blood speckled workman's boots. She couldn't catch sight of the drunk, losing him in her panic, causing her heart to rabbit faster in her chest and her stomach to clench. Abigail whips her head around, maybe he'd fallen, maybe he'd taken residence on a bench or crossed the street. She can't find him. She can't see him - where did he go? Did he follow her here, was he stalking her? She needed to leave, no, she needed to flee.

Before Abigail can even begin to process what she's doing, her legs move once more, then she's jogging, running, sprinting down the paved walkway. She turns one block after the other, until the bright lights of the ale houses and higher end hotels morph into dirtier, more crowded establishments. Rowdy laughter and drunken choruses follow her from one dingy brothel to another. Her lungs are burning, and sharp pain flows through her abdomen with every inhale. But she can hardly stand the thought of stopping, now only able to react to the animalistic terror the slurred words drove her to (she was a fool to ever think she'd gain the courage to face Mr. Hobbs, reduced to instilled panic every time she was scared).

Abigail notices immediately when drunken hollers and bright brothel lights fade away into even smaller, cramped establishments. There are no lights on in the houses here, and barely any sounds could be detected apart from a hissing stray cat or a startled dog.

She knows she's nearing the city limits, and soon she'd be confronted with wide country roads and tall evergreens. It still shocks her into stillness when she passes through one last unassuming sector to be confronted with the tall stumps of tree tops she'd only glimpsed not an hour previous. Her lungs heave loudly, and she doubles over with the exhaustion that suddenly overtakes her. Abigail allows the brief stop when she doesn't hear any pounding footsteps behind her, still afraid but calming with each proper inhale she manages.

Pressing a fisted hand to her stomach, Abigail barely holds back a retch and is reduced to gasping for air when her stomach stops heaving. The bag that banged against her back and

shoulders through her journey slips down her shoulder and rests in the crook of her forearm. Distractedly, Abigail brings the strap across her chest and tries to stand straight.

As soon as her eyes catch the brilliant shine of the stars high above her, she hears a loud *snap!* from inside the deep dark recesses of the forest. Like a deer once more caught in the unseen gaze of a hunter, Abigail freezes. In her panicked stillness she can hear what she had not over her loud gasps for breath, and what sends her heart from a cold stop to rushing in her ears once more. A sharp staccato from behind Abigail had just reached her ears, the telltale clacking of heels on cobblestone steps.

She hardly gives herself a breath or a moment of consideration before she's off once more. This time Abigail is fully aware of what she's doing and fully conscious of the desperation that courses through her veins, spurred even faster by the echoing pants of a desperate pursuer.

Abigail saw the outline of someone reaching out to her in the shadows cast forward on the road.

Veering off the dirt path, she fully submerges herself into the cluttered chaos of the forest. She might not know these woods, but she knows how to outrun a predator - or, at least, how to confuse them enough to hide and weather the search.

Abigail can hear the loud footfalls crunching behind her, and distracts herself from imagining the ice cold breath of a monster on the back of her neck by pulling back a branch she passes so it might hit her pursuer in the face. She looks for more branches and rocks to throw behind her, sick joy spreading through her when she hears a sickening crack and a yell.

Barely sparing a glance behind her, Abigail weaves further and faster through the trees, now confident and distracted from her pain. She stumbles slightly when her pursuer calls out to her, voice garbled and pitched high. It's almost a scream, her name, tearing through the silence of the surrounding nature.

Gasping and spluttering, Abigail trips and falls. She cries out in frustrated desperation, gathering her feet back up under herself and starting out again even faster than before.

When the trees thin and the forest line disappears into grassy fields, Abigail could swear her heart stopped. She couldn't rest, though, neither could she turn around. So she runs headfirst into waist high grass, hoping against hope that whoever was following her would be delayed enough to see only a speck on the horizon by the time they, too, got to the forest line. Her legs pump harder, and arms swish tightly by her sides.

Soon, the same dirt road from earlier comes into focus, and she turns into its path. Following it might give her a quick route to another forest, or at least a clear enough view behind her to see the snare before it snaps closed around her.

Instead of foliage however, she's confronted with an oddly sharp grey that cuts the horizon to the side of the path, coming closer and closer. It's so far away from the road that Abigail only realizes it's a wall when she's directly across from it. Tossing a quick glance over her

shoulder and calculating the risk, she changes course towards the protection the wall might offer.

It must be a garden wall, she thinks, when green vines come into focus and seem to climb over the man-made obstacle only to dangle over its achievement. A good sign, either the groundskeepers care too little to watch after it, or there are none to speak of. Abigail barely slows her speed, instead transferring the energy into a shuffled jump and clutches at the overgrowth as she comes into contact. From there, she climbs. Keeping her body low and flat into the foliage, she risks throwing a quick look over her shoulder to see the tiny outline of a figure off in the distance turning around in confused circles.

Abigail practically throws herself over the top and falls into a clump of bushes on the ground. Relief and fading adrenaline rattles through her blood, leaving her shaking and choking in the mossy dirt. She dry heaves once, twice, and then empties the contents of her stomach onto an unfortunate patch of grass.

Deciding she needs to get up when her hand slips and she almost tumbles into her own vomit, Abigail valiantly coaxes her aching limbs into one last effort at transportation. They spasm and protest, but ultimately comply with minimal wobbling and allow her to step around the patch of bile instead of inside it.

It is a garden she'd tumbled into, and a beautiful one at that, she acknowledges. Filled to brimming with all manner of flora and fauna Abigail has never seen or can hardly identify. She follows the trail of rose bushes, that she could see led to an ornate stone seat, but her feet ache and her legs cramp violently when she thinks of sinking into the chair. Her throat is sore and dry, protesting in tandem with her lungs every time she draws in a breath, and she collapses in a heap after only a few moments wandering. Not two meters away from the enchanting image of the bench, she cries out to the indifferent daisies and silent trees.

Clawing the ground beneath her, Abigail refuses to lose herself to her exhaustion. Dragging herself along bit by excruciating bit, she sobs when her hand wraps around the stone leg. Trembling, she sniffs and huffs, steeling herself so that she can scrape together the strength to haul herself into a seated motion. Abigail gets as far as kneeling when the dispersing weight on her shins racks a fresh agony through her overtired legs.

She grasps the stone edge of the seat, and the drip of her tears discolor the cool grey, blotted in patches of black in the light of the moon.

This, is where she's found moments later. With tear tracks decorating her helplessly resigned features, confronted by pounding footsteps and the pale blue aurora of the rising sun.

Chapter End Notes

Your comments struggle to keep up with Abigail's frantic pace, your kudos try to hunt down whoever was following Abigail

The little girl with grass stains

Chapter Summary

How are Will and Hannibal doing? Crying during and after sex? Oh, okay.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal clutches the thick telegram paper until the message is barely seen through the crumples and ridges forming in the wake of his anger. Letting out a controlled exhale, Hannibal calls out for Anthony's assistance.

Anthony, having barely gotten five steps down the hall after delivering said telegram, swiftly returns, visibly concerned at the cold tone Hannibal summoned him with.

"Please inform the telegraph office to block all correspondences further from one 'Mr. Chilton', or any 'Frederick' attempting to contact us." He informs the butler icily, before waving the deformed slip dismissively.

"And dispose of this immediately, I can't stand to look at it any longer." He concludes with an almost venomous air, biting through his words with stiff composure.

Hannibal had thought the days of parading gamblers and bloodsucking acquaintances claiming to have found their long lost daughter were over, that they'd all given up beating the dead horse for scraps. He can't even seem to find the proper emotions anymore in response. It wasn't exactly shocking that Frederick, one of the shadiest advisors he'd employed years ago, had stooped so low. It only vaguely struck him in a way that didn't fully register, how foolish was his past self to allow Frederick so close to his family with so esteemed a position.

He'd long given up pity for those with a similar scheme or acquaintance when his trusted footman, Tobias, and the once loyal Franklyn had tried the same charade. Now, he simply signed a single cheque with an undisclosed sum to send them away any time they made enough of a nuisance, it kept the bloodsuckers far enough from Hannibal's husband, and he cared for nothing more.

"Is that all, my lord?" Anthony's inquiry makes Hannibal consider for a moment, his mind still lingering on the contents of the telegram and its sender. If Frederick had sent word ahead, that meant he was likely in Paris, and would attempt to approach him and Will sometime soon.

"No. Please clear our calendars for any events in the upcoming weeks. Say, from the 14th to the end of next month." Pausing, once more contemplating how to avoid a confrontation that would most negatively affect Will, he adds, "And inform the staff that no visitors are to be

allowed on property grounds. Expected or not. Send cancellations or regards in our name if you must."

Bowing slightly, despite how many times both Will and Hannibal had expressly told him it was completely unnecessary, Anthony retreats with the offensive letter and a soft ' *Of course, my lord* '. The door to the library shuts with a soft click, leaving Hannibal to muse over the options on how to spend their newly freed evening.

His mood having been ruined by the telegram, something itches at the back of his mind, fingers and feet restrained from twitching restlessly in a desire for action. Hannibal briefly entertains the idea of just disposing of the squabbling hydra head that plagues his home and invades his mind, before dismissing the thought. It could bring more attention instead of eliminating it, even if the darkness inside of Hannibal growls and snarls at how he evaded confrontation. Still the itch lingered, festered, for the rest of the afternoon, until Hannibal found himself in the kitchen.

He hadn't made a meal in weeks, not that he was especially busy, but the inspiration was nowhere to be found. Hannibal had temporarily avoiding the hobby after a particularity distracted batch of bread induced sickness upon ingestion, resolving to avoid forcing himself into creating something Will would ingest without reservations simply because he had made it.

The aforementioned husband, and victim of one of Hannibal's only culinary failures, was currently trying to rest in anticipation of the night's previous plans. Hannibal would have woken him up promptly after the change of plans, if the thought of presenting him with a meal as well weren't so appealing. Hannibal can picture the flustered amusement that would curl through Will's features, and *Oh,* how he had learned to treasure each bit of gentle domesticity he could salvage these days.

By the time Hannibal had put the final swipe of sauce and sprinkling of herbs on the artfully arranged plates, the sun was long set and he could hear Will slowly lumber down the stairs (Accompanied by excitedly clicking claws that no longer made him wince and picture hardwood scratches every time he heard them, as he found himself forgetting every time Will smiled at him for tolerating the messy companion). Hannibal picks up their plates and makes the swift journey to the dining room with just a hint of haste in his long strides.

Thankfully, the staff noticed his presence in the kitchen and set the dining table for two. One placed at the head of the long table, and the other at the right hand seat. Hannibal does not fidget with the silverware, nor does he fret over the wine pairing, and he absolutely does *not* jump infinitesimally in his suit of skin when Will calls his name from the hall just outside.

Smoothing down his casual ensemble, he steps out to beckon Will inside with a cajoling arm and a small smile. Winston tries to follow, but is barred by the door and Hannibal's leg, despite Will's imploring eyes. He frowns slightly at Hannibal's determined expression, but it's quickly wiped from his face when he sees the meal set before them.

Every time it happens, Hannibal never comes quite close enough to the words that describe exactly which emotions flick through Will's expression each time he surprises him. First, something flushed graces his cheeks, Hannibal's favorite part. The coloring spreads over his

nose and to his ears when the trepidation in his features morphs into confusion. Then, it travels down his neck and a hint of selfish satisfaction makes him swallow tightly, melting into a quietly contented, if slightly bewildered, joy. And through it all, his eyes would gradually soften in degrees, until his gaze practically melted Hannibal just upon connection.

Silently, Hannibal guides Will to the head seat, and whispers a quiet description of the meal set before them. Hannibal's heart clenches and thaws at how quickly and dutifully Will eats most everything set on his plate, remembering the years when he'd pushed and prodded at Hannibal for every detail of each food item, only satisfied when he'd managed to get him to trip up slightly in his explanation. Will had just sat back with a contented sigh, hands rested on his stomach, pleasantly full, when he voices the question Hannibal had been preparing for the whole afternoon and most of the night.

Will leans forward, wiping his mouth with a cloth napkin before speaking, "Weren't we supposed to go Mrs. Komeda's for that social gathering tonight?"

He nods in confirmation before providing an answer, "Yes, but I cancelled upon learning more of the guest list and those that had *Répondent, s'ils le voulaient*." Hannibal answers.

Will blinks, before reaching for the glass of water he'd switched out for his wine after only a few sips. Hannibal sees him process the statement for a moment, and realize what he truly means.

"Ah." He winces after swallowing. Will turns his face down and rearranges the ends of the silverware for a distraction. Something seems to occur to him, and he keeps his eyes downcast as he makes his concern known.

"I haven't missed a date, have I? This isn't some anniversary or early celebration I forgot?" As he keeps speaking his face pinches more and more in worry.

Hannibal shakes his head definitively and reaches over to hold Will's hand, where it picks and pulls at the fabric of the tablecloth. "No Mylimasis, I simply wanted to surprise you. I found myself longing for your company in a setting similar to the days of our courtship."

At the mention of their past, Will flushes and his face pinches once more, only this time in a sort of embarrassed delight.

"Oh. Well, then, that's alright."

They leave the dishes to soak, fully aware that they would be cleaned and disappear by the morning, but neither could bring themselves to care.

Hannibal reaches for Will's hand in he foyer, and twirls him slowly to an invisible orchestra. They barely do more than shift slightly, unable to attempt any grand steps or moves. Hannibal, because he is just slightly tipsy enough to be whimsical, and Will, because he is under no illusions that his body could tolerate it. Will lets out a joyous laugh, free and unfettered, the likes of which Hannibal hasn't heard in years. The few crow's feet and smile lines that decorate his face crease beautifully, and Hannibal knows he'll never forget such a

beautiful arch of his rosy lips, already setting up a whole slew of rooms in his mind palace dedicated to it.

That night, for the first time in so long, they made love. It held the sweet tenderness of an embrace when one has been parted from their lover. Like a kiss in the rain, the feeling can never be exactly replicated, yet celebrated each and every time one kisses again. It is pleasurable, but that is not the root of why they partake in the act this night. They do it for the intimacy of it, of joining together for the benefit of the one and the whole. It binds them together. Reminds them they are alive, together, tonight.

Even though their daughter is not. Tears softly spill from two sets of eyes, and they grasp at each other in increasing desperation as both crest wave after wave and blindly reach for a climax, for the reprieve it would lend.

Hannibal cries out from where he holds himself above Will, but when he endeavors to bury his face in the expanse of Will’s bared neck, hands scrabble from their place around his shoulders and back to wrench his face up. Their eyes meet, blurry and unfocused, and Hannibal almost chokes when Will pushes their foreheads together while swiping the tears from his cheeks with his thumbs. The action so sweet and unbidden, so caring and tender, that Hannibal only finds it in himself to undulate once, twice, and on the third exertion he finds release to the sweet sound of Will's keening voice and the rough calluses of his fingers dragging down his cheekbones.

Not one to neglect a bed partner, Hannibal reaches down to where Will still desperately aches and brings him over the threshold into blissful ecstasy that follows the near torture of drawn out pleasure. Sharing the same panting breath, faces almost crushed against each other, Hannibal uncoils. Muscles, bones, head and heart untense, functions pushed to the breaking point and releasing in unison after, finally, the peak has come and gone.

Hannibal barely manages to stumble up to clean the both of them and encase them in darkness before surrendering to the siren call of Will's inviting arms. Wrapped around each other once more, hearts beating as one, Hannibal and Will fall into the deep. dreamless sleep accompanying tired minds and heavy limbs.

Will lays awake under soft covers and a bear of a husband. He’d been awake for some time now, his irregular sleep schedule having decided to rear its head, now the reason why he finds himself unable to fall back asleep. Regretting the long nap he’d taken this afternoon, Will lets out a small sigh. Hannibal shifts from where he’s resting on the entire right side of Will’s body, and lets out his own rumbling sigh in response.

Smiling softly, Will pushes Hannibal’s hair from his face so he can turn down and see at least the top half, where it’s shoved against his clavicle. Petting the crown of his head for a bit, his

thoughts are distracted and disjointed. Distractedly filled with sentimentality and happy memories.

Soon enough, though, Will finds his way back to his train of thought and back to considering his options, and what to do next. He couldn't very well spend the rest of the night laying in bed, just thinking about the hours to come made him antsy and irritable.

He could wake Hannibal up, but as soon as the notion presented himself, he discarded it. Both needed their sleep, and Hannibal would, without a doubt, over analyze just why Will was awake and why he woke Hannibal up.

Or he could get up and wander, maybe make some tea. His throat parches, and carefully he takes account of his body. His leg doesn't feel too stiff, it hasn't locked yet, so he shouldn't need assistance getting up or walking. Glad for it too, as he can't help the dark shame that claws its talons into his gut and whispers bitter detractions each time Hannibal steadies him when he stumbles over his own legs.

With one last sweep of his fingers through Hannibal's greying locks, and a chaste kiss pressed to his forehead, Will begins the process of extracting himself from the heavy weight and entangling limbs of his devoted husband. Slowly, carefully, he pulls away and inches closer and closer to the edge of the bed, before sitting up and looking back to make sure he hasn't woken Hannibal.

His breath still even and deep, Will lets the muscles in his shoulders un-tense. Hands on weathered knees, he pushes himself up and pauses as he's stood up straight, trying to chase his panting exhales into the slow monotone it had been just minutes before. Twisting his back and idly stretching sore muscles, Will quietly makes his way across the room to grab his robe and the single candelabra used for occasional nightly trips outside their rooms such as this.

Having only loosely wrapped the robe around himself, Will shivers when the chill of the hall encompasses him, and hurries to close the door behind him so that Hannibal won't wake from the draft. It slams shut louder than he'd like, and the sound echoes through his bones and rattles his nerves. Maybe he should have stayed in bed.

Winston looks up from his plush bed across from the doors to their rooms and gives his tail an excited wag. He yawns and extends his limbs before clambering up to join Will in his mission. He smiles down at the dog, and gives him some ear scratches before carrying on further down the hall.

Soon the cold is too much, and after setting down the candelabra and tying the robe more tightly around himself, Will finally sets off down the stairs. He is accompanied by the warm weight of Winston's coat where it presses against his shin, and carefully makes his way down, gripping the banister, for the second time that night.

One foot in front of the other, one wedge after the other, again and again until he's reached the bottom of the staircase. Will lets out the air he'd worriedly clutched in his chest, as he always does when he makes the journey by himself. Winston nudges his cold nose at the hem of his sleeping pants, burrowing into his ankle and offering support. Will lets out a small

chuckle at the act, trading out his previous fear for shaky relief. If he were to fall by himself this late at night, he is well aware of the weight of his actions.

The danger well past now, Will relaxes, and makes his way to the kitchen. Passing by the foyer, he dimly registers the beauty of the night, and the rarity of a full moon shining through the countless floor-to-ceiling windows Hannibal had insisted on. The sun will rise soon, he thinks to himself, and takes a moment to bask in the glow of the moon before continuing on.

Will tries to make as little noise as possible when he fills a kettle and warms it on the gas stove, but ultimately fails in being completely silent. He's just grateful the only attention he'd garnered was from the night guards, and after sheepishly explaining what he was doing and offering them some tea as well, he'd been left alone. As he leaves the tea to steep, Will manages to find a jerky scrap for Winston to chew on, as a reward for his loyalty.

On his way back to the stairs, Will briefly pauses by the foyer windows again. Should he take his tea outside? From his view there doesn't seem to be any wind, nor snow, the stone seat blessedly clear of sleet or dust.

As he studies the garden, a sudden motion catches his eye. Odd, there's no wind, none of the other plants had swayed and-

Oh.

Oh.

That was no plant.

Will, frozen in place, watches the girl crawl with a sort of determination and desperation in her face. Eyebrows set, clear tracks painted down muddy cheeks leading up to blue eyes, dark and shining reflectively with the light of the moon. Like two gems, so familiar, framed by long brown hair dusted with dirt and twigs.

After so many years, an almost forgotten memory comes unbidden with the sort of clarity Will had previously thought exclusively reserved for night terrors or moving pictures. Little Abigail, playing in the garden and falling into the rose bush. She came to him almost as fast as he'd rushed to her, crying and with that same despairing look in her eyes, sure her entire world had ended. Thorns and branches in her hair that had to be combed through so gently by Hannibal, bloody hands and knees that were bandaged by Will. Tears that were kissed from her cheeks and shivering sobs that were soothed from her lungs by her fathers, she refused to go to the garden for weeks in fear.

The girl, his Abigail, he's sure, collapses with her head sheltered by her arms on the seat.

The cup Will had been clutching in clammy hands drops from his stiff fingers and shatters on the floor. Shoving open the great glass doors, Will starts forward with a limping run, pushing his legs as hard and fast as they can carry him. As he tumbles through bushes and disregards any paths, he manages to find a rhythm and no longer falters on each stride. He knows his robe is surely ruined, but the wet grass that stains it reminds him that he's no longer dreaming. There is a *girl* in his garden and he *knows* it's his daughter. Deep in his chest, to

the core of his self he knows he wouldn't mistake his Abigail, knows he could never forget her face.

His leg aches and burns, but it works to carry him to his daughter. Will's feet pound the ground hard enough that he knows he's trampling through the foliage, but he couldn't care. He can't care about anything else in this moment when his girl is in such pain, when she sobs so dejectedly, and collapses with the weight of the world on her shoulders.

And then he's there, in front of her. His voice cracks the first time he tried to call out to her, but when he tries again she looks up. So sad, so shy, ready for some sort of punishment with a steely resolve sitting odd on her features.

And he *knows*, for certain in this moment, that she is his Abigail. That this was the same shy girl who hid behind his knees and wound her arms around his neck and squeezed so hard through contagious giggles because she knew no other way to express her love.

Will stumbles around the bench, falling to his knees, and he grabs her and clutches at her. She stiffens slightly, but melts when he starts murmuring nonsensical endearments in desperate French. And soon she's clutching back, struggling to gain a grip around him, her nails scraping against his shoulders in their frantic need to close the gap the years had opened.

He couldn't care for the yelling guards, nor the panicked servants he can hear scrambling to reach them. He has his daughter, it doesn't matter who they're found by anymore. They don't need to escape to the garden when they've found each other here, by the rose bush, and are graced by the cool warmth of the sunrise.

Chapter End Notes

1. I guess we all know where Abigail inherited her instinctual running from.

2. There is no way in *hell* Hannibal would lower himself *morally* to say the actual acronym 'RSVP' when he could flex his french. Nope, nuh-uh baybeyyyy.

Phew! One more chapter y'all, just an epilogue though :) Thank you for reading!!!

Your comments try and collect all the broken glass shards so that nobody hurts themselves, and your kudos just want some damn tea after all this drama

Coda - (Oh, but then there were four)

Chapter Summary

A sweet end for our quartet. Maybe we should get them trumpets...form a band...

Chapter Notes

Thanks for stickin' around this long! As a little easter egg, I'm letting you know that the weird chapter titles are actually all part of a poem! It's lackadaisical and just a dialogue between a parent and child over a recent runaway, but I hope knowing that gives them new meaning :).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ball had been planned for months in advance. Word had spread quickly that the Graham-Lecters' daughter had been found, and word of the upcoming celebration spread even quicker. Especially at the abnormal specifications and guest list. Firstly, hardly any were invited, and among the attendees were said to be several *commoners*, which further reduced said guest list by many indignant lords and ladies. But Will could hardly care for them, if they thought so much about social status and hierarchy then they weren't welcome.

Secondly, rumors of the location spread like wildfire, varying in exaggeration and truth. Since few prone to gossip had ever seen the inside of the remote estate, many were concerned as to where they would be and how to dress accordingly. When the rumors were finally put to rest by the additional informative letters sent to those who had RSVP'd, a sort of uproar sprang up among those who hadn't been invited. The Graham-Lecter gardens, as a whole, had always been the subject of admiration and great legend among high society circles across Europe. Every property they had taken residence in had expansive gardens, and were promptly snatched up when they vacated the premise.

Will still chuckled to himself in the days leading up to the ball at the sheer volume of attention the thing had garnered. When he had gotten over his caution towards Abigail's lover, they too had traded hesitant jokes and bonded over their general distaste for the snobs of high society. The first Will had heard of the aforementioned lover was when Abigail had cried with her head in his lap for hours over how heartbroken she was, and Will found himself wary of the girl when she'd shown up hours later that same day with flowers and apologies. Needless to say, she needed to prove her love to the Graham-Lecters' daughter (and fathers), before they even gave her the time of day. Surprisingly, she had rose to the task and even managed to impress Will with how apparent her dedication was to Abigail, without being obsessive or controlling.

He still couldn't believe his little girl had gone and grown up so quickly. Seeing her again was a lesson in letting go of the toddler she once was and holding on to the young woman, who could make her own decisions and court her own lovers, she had become.

It wasn't easy, at first. Things were stilted and strange, they hardly knew each other, yet had known each other separately for years. She didn't like suits or pants anymore, Hannibal and Will didn't press the subject any further when they saw something cold and fearful in her eyes the only time they'd mentioned it. Though she still loved pale grassy greens and dark navy blues as she had when she was younger, conversing almost incessantly of the current fashions with Hannibal while Will struggled to parse exactly what they were talking about.

But that was alright, because just seeing the way her face lit up and cheeks flushed in animated investment when they found a topic Abigail still loved was well worth it. Soon, they didn't have to defer to talking exclusively about her interests and moved on to carefully broach the subject of shared memories and stories.

Everything had finally clicked together when Hannibal was softly recounting how Abigail used to struggle with pronunciations and hard consonants far past what was expected for a normal child, when she jumped in with an almost pained expression on her face (that they later learned was because of an intense migraine the memory had caused).

"And that's why you called me Abigail, right? Because I couldn't pronounce my V's..." she said, voice wavering.

Hannibal had gone entirely silent, those who had known the story had all died on the night of the invasion, and looking back, Will could pinpoint this as the moment where Hannibal went from indulging his husband in grappling for a daughter figure, to seriously considering whether or not this was actually his daughter.

"Yes, forgive me, I thought you would not remember." Hannibal responds, stonily monotone.

"No, I don't especially remember saying my own name like that, but for a while, everywhere I went, people would correct my pronunciation of my own name and tell me I talked like a child." Abigail's voice petered off towards the end of her sentence, nervously flicking her gaze between Hannibal and Will.

Will gave her a warm smile, always confident in her identity even when she faltered with the weight that the new and old names had over her. He changed the subject, and found himself capitalizing the conversation in the wake of Hannibal's silence.

Later that night, after they bid each other healthy rest and good dreams, Hannibal had turned to Will with shining eyes and trembling hands. Will held him through the aftershocks of accepting the fact that his daughter had survived, that she slept in the room down the hall, and that she'd grown up without them in pain and solitude.

And now, today, months later, he danced with her. Twirling and twisting with relaxed smiles in the light of the setting sun, painted ethereal in the gentle glow and surrounded by flowers. Will thinks of carousel nightlights and the little girl who begged for one more song, one more

story, for her Papa to stay with her, turning her desperate eyes to Will and crying as she disappeared into the shadows of a dark passageway.

But she was here now, his Abigail had run back from the dark shadows and into the light of the garden, even if it took a few years for them to find each other.

Soon enough, their dance was over and Hannibal returned to Will. Neither missed how quickly Marissa approached Abigail, or the sneaky pecks they managed to steal when they thought no one was looking.

Will had taken up residence under the vine arbor, grasping at the beam to steady his leg. Hannibal smoothly slid an arm around his waist and grabbed his free hand to discretely support him. Will smiled, and leaned into Hannibal, having long discarded the thrumming guilt the support used to garner, and his husband matched his emotions with warm eyes that still melted Will's core.

They dragged their eyes away to watch Abigail and their soon to be daughter-in-law fumble through a waltz. Earlier, when the ball was still being planned, Will had grieved over his inability to dance with his daughter, but the feeling soon abated as they grew closer and the overwhelming need to reaffirm and relive old memories faded. Especially when they had accepted that Abigail had changed and matured, making it entirely unfeasible to reenact faded half images of a past life, but the memories could be spoken of fondly now, and shared with joyful smiles instead of borne in pained solitude.

And besides, Will had never been a good dancer.

Turning his face, Will pressed a kiss to his husband's cheek. Hannibal took the opportunity to steal a peck from his lips and whisper something into his ear; "This is all I ever wanted for you, Will."

Surprised, he sucked in a breath, internalizing and treasuring the words. Hannibal was never especially prone to flights of fancy or overwhelming emotions spilling out in the form of platitudes and endearments, despite being the more romantic of the two. Yet somehow, the words held such weight and utter love that Will couldn't doubt for a moment that he meant every single one. And that was why he responded as breathily as he did, startled, but filled with joy at the words, the moment, and the man whose arms were wrapped around his waist, always keeping him steady;

"It's beautiful, Hannibal."

And it was.

FIN

Chapter End Notes

Ahhh I know, kinda short, but I hope you enjoyed either way!

This entire work could not have happened without my wonderful beta and close good friend, Bismuth. Ye who caught all my dumb mistakes and flailed with me over Marissa and Abigail, whose relationship reads coherently only because of them.

This work was also previewed and beta'd by my other dear friend, V. Not the k-pop star, lol, but she really is a superstar for her advice and feedback! Love ya babe, and happy birthday.

And finally, I would've long lost the courage to keep writing without Bloody's encouragement and kind words. I don't think I could've even been able to write the outline of this work if I hadn't been so honored and filled with shocked happiness at their cheerleading. Thank you.

Oh, and before I forget, come say hi on Tumblr!

Your comments watch Abigail and Marissa dance the night away from the punch table and cry, your kudos comfort the distressed comments and offer to spike their drinks with tequila

End Notes

Thank you for reading.

”But then, in spite of us, and without our permission, there comes at last an end to the bitter frosts. One morning the wind turns, and there is a thaw. And so I must still have hope.”
― Vincent van Gogh

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